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THE SPORT OF LIONS

The Punjabi-Sikh Sporting Experience

**A STUDY INTO THE PLACE OF SPORT
IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE
OF PUNJABI-SIKHS IN BRITAIN**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy based on research conducted at the Centre for the
Study of Sport in Society**

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DECLARATION

I have co-authored a populist book on the subject of South Asians and Football. *Corner Flags and Corner Shops – The Asian Football Experience* with Jas Bains.

Whilst the research for this book had certain areas of crossover with the thesis (although there was a different subject group and narrower focus for the doctoral research), such inclusions are clearly referenced and only used to support arguments/statements. No part of *Corner Flags and Corner Shops* is reproduced without due reference.

ABSTRACT

Britain's South Asian diasporic communities have attracted critical scholarly enquiry since their arrival in this country. The multi-discursive nature of such enquiry has largely failed to include the expansive issue of sport. This study investigates the male Punjabi-Sikh association with sport in Britain and thus partially begins to correct the academic omission within studies of South Asians in Britain.

By first detailing the religious, cultural and sporting heritage of Punjabi-Sikhs, the study focuses on how this sporting legacy of has been translated in Britain and how such translation has served to augment the perceived cultural traditions of British Punjabi-Sikhs. The inception of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments and the proliferation of all-Punjabi-Sikh football teams are located within the wider phenomenon of post-war South Asian immigration to Britain. The first-hand oral testimonies of pioneering Punjabi-Sikh immigrants serve to script the narrative of the history and evolution of these tournaments. This work is also ethnographically informed through my association/interaction with a Punjabi-Sikh football club. The players/affiliates of this club provided a research environment and subject base allowing the investigation of their manifold identification with sport.

The subjects of playing football and supporting professional football teams, along with the conspicuous absence of South Asians from top-flight professional football are used to highlight issues of racism(s) and the (re)negotiations of ethnic, cultural and regional identities. The *Shaheedi* Games tournaments are unique Punjabi-Sikh sporting/cultural events that have profound significance for Punjabi-Sikhs. The themes/principles of the carnival inform the discussion/exposition of these tournaments and point to their assumed counter-cultural motifs.

This thesis aims to disavow uncritical conjecture that denies South Asians a diverse and prominent sporting pedigree/prowess. By uncovering and exploring the Punjabi-Sikh history and experience of sport, this thesis illustrates how this specific British South Asian community has an established, accomplished and multifariously dynamic identification with sport.

FIELDS OF STUDY – AN INTRODUCTION

For over four decades South Asians in Britain have received a significant degree of academic attention and scholarly study. Early descriptive narratives of the experiences of newly relocated South Asian immigrants in various British industrial cities provided historical and political underpinning to the chain migration process, as well as offering generalistic insights into these communities' cultural, social and religious practices (cf. Aurora, 1967; Desai, 1963; Hiro, 1967; Rex and Moore 1969; Singh, 1963). These works were followed by and elaborated upon through the various positively integrative and admonishingly precautionary accounts that attempted to configure and convey the experiences of South Asians born in Britain, or those who had arrived in Britain as young children. By adopting linguistically emblematic schemata such as 'culture clash' and 'caught between' or 'product of' 'two cultures', a rather fatalistic and passive model of British South Asian development began to emerge¹ (cf. Anwar, 1976; Watson, 1977). Subsequent works consciously attempted to move beyond the narrow 'culture clash' motif and began to analyse the social and cultural dynamics not just *between* cultures, but also *within* the nuances of specific South Asian cultures (cf. Bains, 1988; Ballard, 1986; Bhachu, 1986; Brah, 1979; Werbner, 1989). More recent studies have continued to examine the perpetual process of identity negotiation experienced by British South Asians. The theoretical

abstractions and implications of cultural and ethnic identities have assumed significant academic importance. Hall (1996a) points out how “(T)here has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’” (p.1). For Modood (1997), “(the) politics of projecting identities in order to challenge existing power relations; of seeking not just toleration of ethnic difference but also public acknowledgement, resources and representation” (p.290), are integral dynamics in British South Asian socio-cultural negotiation.

The multifarious modes of cultural production, expression and exchange amongst and by Britain’s South Asian communities have most recently received scholastic scrutiny and exposition. Holistic studies that attempt to encapsulate the experiences, opinions and actions of British South Asians across a wide variety of selective issues such as education, employment, nationality, religion, image, leisure and familial concerns, have concentrated on examining the most common and most ubiquitous aspects of British South Asian life and lifestyle patterns (cf. Anwar, 1998; Modood et al, 1994, 1997). Possibly the most important contemporary contribution to the study of British South Asians has been the move toward critical exploration of these communities’ engagement with and production of various forms of popular culture. Sharma et al.’s (1996) edited work brought together the diverse forms of contemporary South Asian dance music as produced and re-invented by British South Asians including rock.

¹ Ballard (1994) notes the problematic academic credence afforded to such terms as ‘culture clash’ in

pop, *ragga*, *jungle* and the fusional forms of *bhangra*. Banerji and Baumann (1990) were seen to be breaking new academic ground with studies of the social, economic and aesthetic values and shifts in British *bhangra* music (cf. Banerji. 1988: Baumann, 1990). However, symptomatic of such early critical examination of South Asian youth culture and its products, particularly in relation to *bhangra*, was their reductive proclivity (which now seems somewhat obsolete) to synthesise this musical form's apparent non-commerciality, with "the alternative economic structures upon which it relies [operating] as an obstacle to breaking out of an insular 'ghetto' culture" (Huq, 1996:64). The scholarly analysis of *bhangra* as an important site of sub-cultural struggle for British South Asians has evolved as much as the music itself, invoking and utilising more diverse and divergent theoretical and thematic frameworks. The (sub)cultural and popular political resonance of *bhangra* is succinctly captured by Gillespie (1995) who posits *bhangra* as "a focal point for the public emergence of a British Asian youth culture" (p.46). Indeed, Gillespie's extensive work with the British South Asian communities in Southall, west London, has gone some way to breaking new ground in this particularised field. Her research scrutinised the effects and ramifications of the visual media, particularly television and video, on South Asians in Southall.

Studies such as those of Sharma et al. (1996) and Gillespie (1995) signalled a double-edged departure from previous works that attempted to uncover the changing

Ballard, R. (1994) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. p.30.

dynamics in the lives of British South Asians: they at once recognised the emergent influence and importance of popular cultural forms such as pop music and television, particularly for the younger generations of South Asians, and also realised that Britain's burgeoning young South Asians were themselves effecting a noticeable, at times innovative, contribution within the pervasive realms of pop culture. Indeed, the critical study of popular culture (including the diversity of forms embraced by such a definitive term) is itself a relatively recent engagement. According to Berger, "[T]he study of popular culture has merged with the study of elite culture to lead to a new metadiscipline, cultural studies" (1995:138). It could be argued that the field of cultural studies has championed the cause of the popular (in terms of academic debate) and that everyday, so-called 'low' or popular culture, has enabled cultural studies itself to develop an alternative agenda, if not identity, distinguishing it from the plethora of subjective disciplines that variously served to initiate the field in the first instance (cf., *inter alia*, Fiske, 1989a, 1989b; McRobbie, 1994).

With the merger of ethnic and cultural studies 'opening up' the study of British South Asians to the sights, sounds and semiotics of popular culture, there has been a move away from the precursors of such work, which previously sought to analyse the experiences of South Asians in Britain within official, institutional spheres. Education has received a significant degree of academic attention with studies not only focussing on the educational achievements (or under-achievements) of young British

South Asians, but also seeking to discover parental attitudes and ambitions that exist behind South Asian educational pursuits (cf. *inter alia*. Bhachu, 1985; Ghuman, 1980; Gibson and Bhachu, 1988; Grugeon and Woods, 1990; Mackintosh et al., 1988; Verma, 1989). One of the reasons for such extensive study in this area is due to the real and perceived success of British South Asians in education, a phenomenon noted by Gibson and Bhachu:

The academic achievements of Asian Indians [sic] settled in Britain has received considerable attention in recent years, in particular because Indian students have demonstrated a high degree of success in surmounting both the influence of prejudice and discrimination in British society and that of low socio-economic status (1988:239).

Employment and industry in Britain are further recognised and quantifiable environments in which South Asian involvement has been critically viewed (DeWitt, 1969; Duffield, 1985; Josephides, 1991; Phizacklea and Miles, 1980).² The post-war industrial boom in Britain, followed by the first wave of chain migration from former Commonwealth countries, transformed the factory floor into a multi-racial site of social and political struggle and common interaction. In fact, the wider struggles of factory workers and manual labourers for increased trade union representation and power was, at times, and in certain regions, most vigorously embraced and propounded by immigrant South Asian workers (Josephides, 1991). The relatively

² Both DeWitt, J. (1969) *Indian Workers' Associations in Britain* and Josephides, S. (1991) *Towards a History of Indian Workers Associations* provide detailed historical accounts of the establishment and development of the Indian Workers' Association. Whilst Josephides' work primarily concentrates on the industrial Midlands region in Britain, DeWitt provides a more extensive nationwide account with illustrative recourse made to similar organisations in India.

extensive South Asian participation in British small business practice has also been documented by a number of scholars. drawing particular attention to a penchant toward entrepreneurship amongst certain sections of the British South Asian population (Baker, 1981; Basi, 1996; Ram, 1993; Werbner, 1990). As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, Punjabi-Sikhs did not passively accept such conditions. instead these conditions helped mobilise and shape the Punjabi-Sikh sporting movement itself. There is a notable absence of any definitive and non-institution based studies examining the role of sport in the lives of British South Asians. Whilst their vocational, educational and commercial experiences constitute the bulk of work carried out in the field of British South Asian studies, there has been an increasing interest amongst younger (particularly South Asian) academics in the exploration of the mutual impact of popular culture upon British South Asians and vice versa. Sport has emerged as an increasingly prevalent and versatile marker and vessel of popular culture, completing a self-ordained pop cultural holy trinity that also embraces music and television. Yet, whilst the South Asian participation in, and use of. British popular music and television has acquired studied examination as well as public acclaim/appraisal, these same communities' association with, and penchant for, sporting pursuits, have been almost wholly overlooked. Chapter 7 investigates the multifarious ways in which young British Punjabi-Sikhs identify with and follow the global pop-cultural football phenomenon, revealing a rooted passion and association with the game that is often the converging locus for their negotiations of identities. Sport itself is yet to attain the solid authority within cultural studies that it necessarily demands. Blake (1996) addresses this absence: "[T]his relative invisibility is

puzzling: cultural studies is above all concerned with popular culture, and sport is very much part of popular culture” (p.11). South Asian involvement in sport in Britain is not a subject that has received detailed examination from academics in the fields of ethnic and cultural studies, nor from the expanding discipline of sports studies. Both scholastic disciplines have been unable, or unwilling, to venture beyond the institutionalised boundaries of the conventional domains of sport and explore the vast plains of sporting engagement that South Asians have occupied in Britain for over four decades. Social historians too have not examined the history of sport for British-based South Asians despite (as we shall see in Chapter 6) its prominence in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs since relocating to these shores.

Until relatively recently sport was considered ‘unworthy’ of scholarly attention from the academe. According to MacClancy (1996), “most sociologists, and social historians and many anthropologists have neglected sport as a potentially fruitful object of study” (p.1). One principle reason for such myopic disregard was attributed to generalised ideas of sport solely pertaining to physicality and thus being immutable and ‘natural’. The ill-informed view that sports was somehow external and unrelated to the main and more important aspects of society (particularly the economic and political worlds) lent further weight to the narrow belief that it was not worthy of detailed study (ibid.). In Britain, early sociological accounts of sport, or the nascent ‘sociology of sport’, was “virtually a ghetto subject” (Horne et al., 1987:2). In this

embryonic stage, the works of Parker (1976) and Roberts (1978) allowed sports sociology to assume greater authority and an expanded scope of enquiry (ibid.). Dunning continued the push for the 'serious' study of sport by applying figurational sociology models to sport and leisure (Dunning, 1971; 1989; Dunning and Rojek, 1992). Dunning's figurational approach to the sociology of sport drew from Elias's pioneering concept of 'the civilising process' (Elias, 1978) in an attempt to determine developmental processes that he claimed were in operation in the evolution of (particularly 'western') sports (Elias and Dunning, 1986). The figurationalist school of sports sociology has received sustained criticism, with Jary and Horne in particular arguing that such an approach is both limited and self-situated in a position of pre-eminence within the wider discipline (1987:183-184).³ Despite such criticism, deserved or otherwise, Dunning's contribution and input to the serious, scholarly study of sport cannot be disregarded.

An area of academic interest that struggled for recognition and credibility began to achieve an increased specialist profile with the contributions of scholars seeking to explore beyond the internal mechanisms separating sport from other activities, paying closer critical attention to the impact and effects that sport had on the social environs within which, and on which, it operated (cf. Allison, 1986, 1993; Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Hargreaves, 1982, 1986; Houlihan, 1991; Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). Such

³ Cited in Rojek, C. (1992) 'The field of play in sport and leisure studies' in Dunning, E. and Rojek, C.

thematically innovative and theoretically assured works imbued sports studies with a credence and identity that allowed for it to stand alone as an academic field. indeed, with a growing number of dedicated sports research centres/institutions as oppose to being a passing indulgence of a handful of interested writers and academics. Cashmore`s (1990b) seminal text, *Making Sense of Sport*, endeavoured to provide a holistic inquiry into the popular and private workings and ramifications of sport. In the course of such an undertaking, Cashmore acknowledged the emergent need for the study of sport in society to deploy a manifold, multidisciplinary perspective which concentrated on:

combining contributions from behavioural and physical sciences and making bedfellows out of subjects such as biology and sociology. anthropology and history. We need to view sport prismatically: as a kind of splintered structure of perspectives, each of which discloses a different aspect of the same thing (p.vii).

A culpable and near ubiquitous tendency of many works in the field of sports study (particularly sociological accounts) was to conflate British culture and British sporting practices with those of English culture and English sporting practices. Jarvie (1991a), in his illuminating socio-historical study of the Scottish Highland Games, is critical of such a proclivity that relegates, if not ignores, the experiences, histories and events relating to Irish, Scottish or Welsh peoples. Whilst citing the historically oriented works that have taken studied consideration of non-English sporting experiences (Whitson, 1983; Sugden and Bairner, 1986; Sugden, 1989; Holt, 1989;

Jarvie, 1989), Jarvie proposes that, “the ethnocentralist nature of the sociology of sport and leisure in Britain is but a small reflection of a much broader problem of dependency and domination which exists within the ‘divided’ United Kingdom” (p.1). The inauguration of a new Scottish Parliament and a separate Welsh Assembly, as well as the continued contested move toward a revised political landscape in Northern Ireland, are indicative of the fundamental divisions that exist within a Britain that is no longer regarded as representing the cultural and historical identities of its (politically and geographically) peripheral inhabitants.

Within the generalising scope of British sporting traditions and experiences, the role of sport in the lives of Britain’s ethnic minority populations has gained increasing prominence and interest. In the study of sport and society, the issue of ‘race’ as a biological determinant, and the arguments surrounding racially defined physiological capacities in sports have engendered intensive debate (c.f., *inter alia*, Cashmore, 1982a; Kohn, 1995; Hoberman, 1997; Allison, 1998), and following Sir Roger Bannister’s infamous contribution to the subject of the sporting success of black athletes, the issue exudes an air of controversial notoriety.⁴ Hoberman (1997) argues that the perceived relative success of black athletes in America has not alleviated or

⁴ Speaking at the annual conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in September 1995, Sir Roger Bannister (the first man to run the mile in under four minutes in 1954) speculated on the physiological advantages that black athletes had over non-black athletes. Ranging from a possible longer heel bone and warm climate induced lower subcutaneous fat levels, through to a possible greater elasticity of muscle fibres; the physiologically determined reasons for black athletic

even ameliorated the social and economic disadvantage by which many black African-Americans live. Instead, the pervasive image of black sporting success has led to many young African-Americans regarding sport as their only means to social and financial advancement, as an exit to the stagnation of the ghetto. Coakley (1990) commenting on the 'race' issue in American sports, highlighted the knee-jerk insistence of some white people in sport to seek consoling sanctuary by espousing speculative biological or genetic pre-determinants that endowed black athletes with greater sporting prowess:

For many years blacks were systematically excluded from playing sports with whites because many whites believed they lacked physical skills. Now, when blacks have shown they have physical skills, it is sad and ironic that some whites attribute their success to genetics rather than hard work. This takes away the credit individual blacks deserve for their hard work and commitment to achievement (p.223).

The use of the term 'race' in more recent academic studies of sport has been viewed as rather more problematic than previously. Academic discourse ventured beyond the concept of 'race' as a feasible classification for:

the purity of genetics and biology that is needed to classify humans as belonging to one racial group or another is simply unrealistic, and it is impossible to set up dividing lines between racial groups that would be meaningful or satisfactory to all analysts (Polley, 1998:136).

success, are according to Sir Roger, "rather special" (Radford, 1995:3). His comments on this subject received a fair deal of press coverage: (see Corrigan, 1995; Highfield et al., 1995; Radford, 1995).

Thus, the meaning of 'race' has shifted to embody "essentially a social construction and not a natural division" (Hudson and Williams, 1995:117). The term 'ethnicity' has increasingly come to be used not only in place of 'race' but as a more accurate representation of any group of people "possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity...aware of having common origins and interests" (Cashmore, 1996:102). The convenient tendency to conflate the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' with regard to conveying a particular, distinguishable and defined group of people, is not necessarily an undisciplined or even culpable inclination. Specialist dictionary definitions refer to both 'ethnicity' and 'race' as incorporating a distinct notion of 'common origins'.⁵

Within a sporting context, ethnicity and ethnic identity have a long established mutual association with sport emblematising, if not channelling, the course of ethnic solidarity and expression (cf. James, 1963; Shipley, 1989). Previous works attempting expositions and analysis of how sport has impacted on ethnicity and vice versa in Britain have overwhelmingly concentrated on Britain's black African-Caribbean population and its visible association with sport. The last twenty years have witnessed a pressing move toward the examination of the experiences of black athletes (from across the sporting spectrum and of varying abilities, at various levels of

⁵ In *A Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (1996), Banton refers to 'race' as "a group or category of persons connected by common origins" (p.264). Cashmore's definition of 'ethnicity', in the same edition of the dictionary is, "a group...aware of having common origins and interests" (p.102). The slippage between these two terms is not always consistent in producing intended or correct meanings. The biological associations of 'race' connoting genetic determination point to a 'natural' and

participation); as a consequence, the sport/ethnicity dialectic has almost entirely been located within a black, African-Caribbean discourse (cf. Carrington, 1983; Cashmore, 1981, 1982a, 1982b 1988; Jarvie and Reid, 1997; Lashley 1980, 1990; Maguire, 1988, 1991). Cashmore (1982a) carried out extensive interviews with black sportsmen from across England surveying their individual and collective experiences and producing a socio-historical tapestry of the black sporting experience to that date. Maguire (1988, 1991) concentrated on the apparent categorising of black footballers and rugby union players in England as only suitable for particular positions within their teams and within their sports. By making analogical recourse to the American system of 'stacking', Maguire pointed to the existence of racism at the core of these sports which posited black players in specific pre-determined and inflexible roles that attempted to utilise a misguided notion of black athletic superiority, and accommodate falsely associated intellectual inferiority. The subject of sport and ethnicity/race has evolved into a critically diverse and highly contested field of academic study, moving from the world of parochial conjecture to the equally unforgiving realms of scholastic examination and studied research. It has emerged as a theme that "can now be explored through a historical survey of the post-war period, which will show the ways in which sport has acted as a public forum for debates on ethnicity in a multi-ethnic society" (Polley, 1998:141). The space occupied by South Asians in the 'public forum' of sport has yet to attain complete recognition. With post-war British social history being marked by the influx of diverse peoples from different countries and cultures, the role of sport in their lives too should be duly

immutable state. 'Ethnicity', however, denies such biological determinism and allows for the possibility of choice (and theoretically, movement) in its construction and appropriation.

acknowledged. South Asian sporting achievement and experience in Britain occurs largely outside of the public domain of sport, and thus has failed to capture not only popular public imagination, but also the scrutinising attention of the academe. A few scholars of sport have articulated such absence; the diversity of their own specialised disciplines within the scholarly study of sport signals the extent and discursive ubiquity of this absence (Fleming, 1989; Hargreaves, 1986; Mason, 1988; Polley, 1998). While sport among Britain's black African-Caribbean communities has been critically studied, particularly over the last two decades, the role of sport in the lives of Britain's South Asian communities has not been afforded similar wide-ranging analysis and coverage. Kew (1997) focuses on the 'invisibility' of South Asians in British sport, and their being "under-represented in most sports with the possible exception of cricket, hockey and badminton" (p.101). Professional sport and sport that operates in conventional, institutionalised spheres (sports clubs, school sports, leisure centres, youth clubs) cannot be held as the sole vehicles/avenues for sporting participation. The term 'sports participation' thus has assumed a pseudo-hyper-real significance situating 'sport' in particularised domains and definitively demarcates the borders within which 'participation' of 'sport' can be deemed as being official, recognised and quantifiable. If the sporting experiences of any given community occur outside those recognised realms within which they can be viewed and reviewed, then such experiences of sport are liable to be overlooked. If the community in question is an ethnic minority with differing customs, languages, religions, traditions (sporting and other) to those of the hegemonic majority, then increased distance and strangeness is added to any attempts to recognise and

acknowledge (if not understand) the sporting history and contemporaneous sporting association of that ethnic minority community. Chapter 3 discusses the multi-disciplinary methodological approach that is necessary to explore a research topic that does not always lend itself to conventional means of data gathering. Polley (1998:137) has asserted that, “the sporting history of South Asian immigrants and their children has not been explored in depth”. Polley’s issue-led history of sport in post-war Britain attempts to provide an overview of the effects of ethnicity on British sport and vice versa. As one of the most substantial in the book, Polley’s chapter on sport and ethnicity concentrates on the black British sporting experiences at various levels. This is not in a deliberate attempt to undermine or ignore the role of sport in the lives of British South Asians: “the small amount of material on sport and Asian Britons [sic] has unfortunately meant that the experience cannot be properly explored in a work of this nature. It is hoped that this situation will soon be rectified” (ibid.). This study aims to partially rectify this ‘situation’ – partially because it is not possible for a single doctoral thesis to produce a definitive history and exploration of sport in the lives of the many various South Asian communities in Britain. The manifold heterogeneity of British South Asians is not conducive to any detailed yet concise account of the diverse sporting traditions, ambitions and endeavours of the multitude of people, sub-groups and communities that the appellation ‘South Asian’ embodies. Fleming (1994) is heavily critical of the tendency (amongst many researchers/academics) to use the umbrella term ‘South Asian’ to reductively conflate the divergent peoples of the Indian sub-continent, as well as the differing (often conflicting) histories and experiences that belong to them. He points to the ‘false

universalism' (a term borrowed from Eisenstein [1984] and also used by Raval [1989]) which afflicts much of the work that purportedly provides insights and comment on the various aspects of South Asian experience:

'False universalism'... describe(s) the collective treatment of South Asians without acknowledging, or even considering their heterogeneity. It typically occurs when the process of logical induction is applied inappropriately, and on the basis of limited evidence huge generalisations are made. Consequently, people are often treated stereotypically, and it will become apparent that these stereotypes are damaging and dangerous (Fleming, 1994:164).

Chapter 5 provides a succinct history of post-war immigration to Britain, particularly from the former colonies of the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent. This history points to a set of common trajectories: the mass uptake of low-paid manual labour employment, re-settlement in particular locales, predominantly urban inner-city regions and the multi-dimensional experience of racism, from discrimination in the workplace, through to the restriction of access into certain 'colour-bar' social clubs and institutions. These were shared aspects marking the immigrant experience, but these cannot, however, be used as a point of departure to manufacture extrapolations of incongruous, falsely homogenised aspects of the lives of immigrants in Britain. The paucity of detailed material focusing on the place of sport in the lives of British South Asians engenders the false universalisation of the limited works that exist on the topic. Without greater specificity of the particular South Asian community being

referred to, research which purportedly represents the viewpoint/experience of an indiscriminate grouping under the nomenclature 'South Asian,' merely serves to extend 'false universalism's' academic currency. Differentiation and distinction between the various South Asian communities has to be made a primary objective of any work concerning the peoples of the Indian subcontinent. It is one of the principal projects of this study to define and investigate a specific South Asian community's association with sport, namely, the Punjabi-Sikh sporting experience. The Punjabi-Sikh focus of this study is not an arbitrary concentration. This particular South Asian community has the longest established sporting tradition in Britain. It was Punjabi-Sikhs who first inaugurated specialised sports tournaments that were specifically for the participation/enjoyment of South Asian (predominantly Punjabi-Sikh) immigrants re-settled in Britain. Recognition by community leaders that sport could be used to serve as a powerful agent of ethno-cultural cohesion and support, led to local *Gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) being involved in the organisation and development of Punjabi-Sikh sport in this country. As well as pioneering and sustaining this initial immigrant sports movement in Britain, Punjabi-Sikhs have historically, and contemporaneously, been major players in Indian sport. In Chapter 4 we see how the imperial English assertion that defined Sikhs as a 'martial race' (Fox, 1985:140-159), an image that Sikhs also had to design and define for themselves, has added to the notion of Sikh sporting prowess and competitive/combatative disposition. Sikhs have contributed to many of India's sporting achievements including international success in men's hockey, test cricket, football, wrestling and track and field athletics. For a minority representing less than 2% of India's overall population⁶, Sikh sportsmen

⁶ Helweg (1979:6) has commented on the low percentage of Sikhs in India, describing how the Indian

(and, to a lesser degree, sportswomen) have made a significant contribution to the country's sporting profile. With such a crystallised and lionised association with sport on the subcontinent, it was unsurprising that the diasporic communities of Punjabi-Sikhs relocated in Britain, should be the first and foremost immigrant South Asian grouping to initiate and develop a sporting agenda and programme of their own.

The history of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain is somewhat of a hidden phenomenon. My Punjabi-Sikh origination does not unquestionably place me in a position of insight and authority from which to 'un-cloak' and articulate this community's sporting tradition in Britain. However I have a personal vested interest and attachment to Punjabi-Sikh sport which has perhaps increased my understanding of the role of sport in the Punjabi-Sikh social composition. I have attended the *Shaheedi* Games (an annual sports tournaments organised by the local Sikh communities) since I was a young child, both as competitor and involved spectator, as have many hundreds of other young Punjabi-Sikhs, but fortuitous privilege separates my experience of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain from that of the majority of Punjabi-Sikh sports enthusiasts, as my uncle was one of the pioneers of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain (Chapter 6). I also have close links with the Sikh *Gurdwara* that organised the very first *Shaheedi* Games which took place in Birmingham in 1965. The Sikh Temple in Shelby (West Midlands) was the local *Gurdwara* attended by my family

Sikh population is in fact smaller than the number of Indian Christians. Helweg goes further to outline

since arriving in Britain. It may be difficult to understand and ‘uncover’ the *Shaheedi* Games if one has never attended the events or experienced their unique environment/atmosphere. Watson (1996) makes a similar point in the literary field, “[O]ne cannot research on Proust without having seen Paris: it may be unclear why not, but everyone can perceive it so. It would be rather like expecting to learn to ride a bike by reading a set of directions” (p.53). My father has been an active committee member of the Sikh temple in Shelby for twenty-five years and has been vice-president of the institution. With virtually all *Gurdwaras* in Britain being closed institutions with zealous committees keen to protect an obsolete (often ineffectual and occasionally undemocratic) governing order, my father’s official position at the Sikh temple in Shelby granted me a view of the machinery that operates such a religious/community organisation. As a turban-wearing Punjabi-Sikh, I at least partially adhere to the recognised visual representation of a Sikh male (my near-clean shaven face serve to renege on the faith incompletely disclosed by my image). My father’s strict devotion and adherence to Sikhism is sufficient affirmation of my being ‘one of the brotherhood’.

With my ‘in-house’ knowledge of the falsehood of sporting apathy and generalised ineptitude among British South Asians, and an assurance of the Punjabi-Sikh commitment to and prowess in various sports, I was unhesitatingly critical of any

the multifarious contribution that Sikhs have made in Indian social and cultural development, a

facile reasoning that denied South Asians a prominent sporting dimension. However, only by permitting critically deconstructive analysis is it possible to establish this project's *raison d'être*. It is not only within academia that South Asians are viewed outside of a participatory sporting paradigm: generalised public consensus also holds South Asians to be largely uninvolved with sport, but it is not sufficient to point simplistically to a nebulous mass of ignorance using the lazy appellation 'generalised public'. A large proportion of the white British majority, as well as most African-Caribbean Britons (and a not insignificant number of British South Asians themselves) presume such a South Asian sporting non-association. But this popularised presumption must have a predicator from which it assumes undeserved authority. While Britain's African-Caribbean populations have attained hard-earned successes in national and international sporting arenas (notwithstanding the barriers that proscribe black achievement in other professional spheres, indeed in many sports themselves), British South Asians cannot point to any insurgent presence in sport. For pioneering immigrants from the Caribbean arriving on British shores, the image of the 'black sportsman' was already pervasive in western society through the high-profile afforded to the athletic and skilful excellence of Jessie Owens, Pele, Eusebio, Garfield Sobers and in the United States of America, the ground-breaking exploits of baseball star Jackie Robinson. A similarly eclectic and potent image of South Asian sportsmen has not been as forthcoming. With Indian and Pakistani Test cricket teams unable to impress any sustained expression of competitive zeal, during a period for subcontinental cricket which Bose (1990) describes as the "dull, dreary 1950s" (p.218), it was the task of Pakistan, but most emphatically India, to signal a sporting

contribution that denies the scale of their numerical minoritisation in India.

pedigree through the domination of world, specifically Olympic field hockey, but this is not a sport that is globally popular or as widely disseminated. Thus whilst indigenous Britons could make precursive recourse to outstanding black sports stars as a means of situating the sporting pedigree of African-Caribbean immigrants, popular sport did not proffer any such high profile markers of South Asian sporting stardom/excellence. South Asians are not regarded as possessing great sporting prowess and/or passion and hence have not received organised encouragement or been driven to excel in sport to the same extent as their African-Caribbean and white counterparts. The lack of professional South Asian sporting success is a two-way dynamic that cannot singularly be attributed to the failings of either the ethnic minorities themselves, or to the dominant white majority.

To redress this popularised belief that South Asians do not have an impassioned association with sport in Britain it is necessary to look beyond professional sport and, as previously stated, outside the formalised spheres of sporting participation. Such an approach would engender a requisite break from traditional research in the field of sport/leisure studies, a departure that essentially situates itself firmly in the socio-cultural universe of a particular South Asian minority, and not in the standardised Eurocentric realms of accepted sporting domains. Such an approach recognises “racially defined groups not as passive recipients of Anglo-European culture but as active creators of their own social worlds and as groups actively involved in resisting

cultural oppression” (Birrell, 1989:215). Commenting on the negative experiences of African-Americans existing in a dominant, majority white society. Turner and Perkins (1976) noted the ineffectual and condescending nature of the dominant paradigms used in social scientific studies to investigate the various aspects of African-American lifestyle patterns. Similarly, social scientific attempts to categorise and quantify South Asian sporting involvement have been of limited scope, focusing on the avenues of sports participation that have been established and mostly occupied by a white majority. South Asians’ absence from this narrow scope of enquiry, has resulted in their own sporting endeavours being ignored, as they exist and operate outside of the “ideological vault” (p.8) and quantifiable milieu of sport as defined within Eurocentric scholastic parameters.

Football, arguably sport’s most emergent global marker, has historically and contemporaneously refused to admit its expansive popularity amongst Britain’s varied South Asian communities. Indeed, the authoritative gatekeepers of British football have blindly shackled, at times culpably ignored, the input and ambition that these communities harbour toward the national game. When Bains (1995) deployed the much vaunted British penchant for irony in the title of his report *Asians Can’t Play Football*, his satirical assertion was somewhat lost on many of those for whom the report would have been of greatest benefit, i.e. the controlling football authorities. Instead, the title merely served to crystallise an ill-conceived and erroneous sporting axiom, the mechanics of which the body of the report successfully evinced. More

recent work (Bains and Johal, 1998. 1999) has illustrated that South Asians in Britain can and do play football, and that they enjoy a multifarious association with the sport spanning the playing, spectating and commercial aspects of the game. As we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, the ill-conceived common sense notion of South Asian indifference toward football is denied by a history of organised Punjabi-Sikh football in Britain extending over four decades, and boasts numerous all-South Asian teams spread throughout England⁷. This study represents an attempt to fill part of the void that exists in current scholarly work in the field of sport and ethnicity, complying with Watson (1996) assertion that “[R]esearch is performed to right a wrong, whether of commission or omission... or to correct a failing” (p.15).

The absence of any critical socio-historical accounts of the place of sport on the landscape of British South Asian culture has to be redressed, but in a manner that does not fall foul of generalised extension that holds the sporting experiences of one particular South Asian community as representative of, and normative for, all South Asians living in Britain. By concentrating the focus of this thesis on Punjabi-Sikhs, such ‘false universalism’ can be avoided. In the process, popular facile conjecture that denies a reductively homogenised South Asian population a diverse and committed

⁷ Whilst there are a number of South Asians football teams outside of England, almost all of which are located in Scotland, they are predominantly made up of British Pakistani Muslims and those of Pakistani descent. Dimeo carried out doctoral research at the University of Glasgow into the levels of racism faced by Scottish South Asian teams in local leagues, and also in professional football. He also explored the dynamics of sectarian Scottish identities as they are played out through the agency of football and shown how Scottish-Asians are aligned, and align themselves, along such sporting

sporting pedigree can be negated by illustrating the salient position of sport in the lives of one particular South Asian community, namely the Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain. It is both apt and necessary to clarify and qualify my concentration on the *male* Punjabi-Sikh sporting experience. Although the tenets of the Sikh faith espouse gender equality and partnership, Sikhs persist in archaic socio-cultural doctrines that preserve a near ubiquitous male bias. Such chauvinism is not unchallenged. Bhachu (1991) notes how British Sikh women “play a more central role in perpetuating and generating their cultural locations and ‘traditions’ in a process of negotiation with a number of changing economic and political forces” (p.401). The progressive movement that has witnessed British Sikh women (and other women from South Asian communities in this country) negotiate and effect for themselves increased levels of empowerment through educational, vocational, political, cultural, religious and social struggles should not be considered as being outside, or independent of the general economic and political conditions effecting the wider society. They are often regarded as “victims of static and autonomous oppressive cultural structures who are denied equality” (p.402). It would be simple and convenient to follow such a line of explanation to account for the absence of a female focus to this study. Sport has not achieved a comparably prominent status in the lives of Punjabi-Sikh women it has for their male counterparts in Britain. This cannot be put down to disinterest or apathy toward sporting pursuits. With the more fundamental and pressing demands of attaining greater mobility in such vital areas as employment, education and politics,

sectarian lines. See Dimeo, P. and Finn, G.P.T. (1998) *Scottish Racism, Scottish Identities – The Case of Partick Thistle*.

sport has had to assume peripheral significance in the working lives of Punjabi-Sikh women. Parmar notes how:

[South] Asian women have been at the forefront of numerous industrial, political and social struggles over the last decade... [and] have also been subjected to the full oppressive force of immigration legislation and institutional racism at all levels of British society (1982:236).

The Punjabi-Sikh sporting experience and heritage in Britain is however overwhelmingly a male experience. From the founders of the very first *Shaheedi* Games in this country, and the competitors and spectators who attended these tournaments, through to the proliferation of British Punjabi-Sikh football teams, Punjabi-Sikhs and sport in actuality refers almost unvaryingly to Punjabi-Sikh males and sport. Indeed, the history of sport in the Punjab displays similar gender bias, although a handful of notable exceptions penetrate this masculinised sporting stronghold.⁸ There are also methodological reasons for this study's focus on Punjabi-Sikh males. My local Sikh *Gurdwara*, Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* in Shelby, was the religious establishment from which the first *Shaheedi* Games tournaments were organised, and which had its very own, well-established football club. An increased subject-base was achieved through my links with a non-league Punjabi-Sikh football club from Coventry whose players and affiliates represented the different stages in the evolution of sport (specifically football) for the wider Punjabi-Sikh community in Britain. All of these teams/clubs were male-only bands and the tournament organising

⁸ Punjabi sportswomen such as Ajinder Kaur, Prema Saini and Harjeet Kaur (Indian international hockey players of great ability and repute) are amongst India's most successful sports stars. Indian women's hockey has historically relied on players from the state of Punjab for international competition. See Singh, S. (1984) *Sportsmen of the Punjab*.

committee members were also all men. I am not claiming the difficulty of finding a suitable research environment involving Punjabi-Sikh (or a mix of South Asian) women as an excuse to exclude them from the main body of this work. Leisure/sports centres in regions of high South Asian population do have women from these communities using their facilities and participating in activities, but a project with time and space limitations does not allow for a composite study of the Punjabi-Sikh sporting experience with detailed and studied reference to gender differentials duly accounted for. The convenience of limiting my scope of inquiry to males is not inconsiderable, but should be measured and judged alongside the dangers of falsely conflating Punjabi-Sikh male and female experiences of sport into an indiscriminate whole. This would be to ignore the often vastly divergent conditions impacting on men and women, with different effects. It is with a view to avoiding such oversimplification that this study focuses on the role of sport in the lives of Punjabi-Sikh males only.

CHAPTER 1

THE STATE OF PLAY – A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Although there is limited material appertaining to South Asians and sport in Britain, existing works require due evaluative consideration in order for their contribution to the study of sport in the lives of British South Asians to be measured and defined. In nearly all of these studies, sport is given a narrow defining sphere that encompasses school-based physical education (P.E) and extra-curricular sports activities/clubs, and leisure/sports activities as provided by community centres, youth clubs and leisure/sports centres. Before concentrating on the separate case-studies and projects that are germane to the subject of South Asians and ‘sport’, a common criticism of these works’ insistence on confining their scope of enquiry, indeed, their definition of sport and what it is to be ‘participating in’ sport, must be stated. Attendance or non-attendance at youth clubs and leisure centres cannot be held as accurate indices of an individual’s overall sporting participation and commitment. Yet, this type of methodology, one that adheres to a quantitative bias, manufactures convenient extrapolations concerning disparate and diverse ethnic minorities’ relationships with sporting pursuits. Such attendance can reflect levels of sports/leisure provision maintained by specific local authorities and the accessibility of such facilities. Any sporting activity that occurs outside of these ‘controlled’ domains of sports participation are probably not known, noted or recognised.

While this study has been narrowed to Punjabi-Sikh males, failure to at least acknowledge studies into South Asian women and sport would be to ignore the pioneering contributions made to the existing body of research into ethnic minorities and sport/leisure (cf. Carrington et al., 1987; Dixey, 1982; Hargreaves, 1994; Lovell, 1991; Parmar, 1988).

Of the studies that do not solely concentrate on the impact of sport in the lives of Britain's South Asian women, Verma and Darby's (1994) work represents the most extensive attempt to define the role of sports participation in the cultural make-up of Britain's various ethnic minority communities. Verma and Darby undertook a two-year research project that sought to explore how people from ethnic minority groups viewed their own relationship with and desires for sport, as well as how they perceived the sporting and leisure provisions that those official bodies whose objective it was to make sport accessible for all, were responsible for. In a study that surveyed the opinions of 1000 respondents, it was crucial to their cause that the authors/researchers precisely defined their conception of the particular ethnic minorities that were under investigation. This, indeed, stood out as one of the strengths of this study. Verma and Darby's work does not fall foul of falsely universalising British ethnic minority members. Not only is their explicit classification of South Asians into distinct bands, in this case, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, East African Asian and Indian (the latter incorporating both Sikhs and Hindus, with

approximately half this group being of Punjabi-Sikh origin). Black Britons were also divided into those with an African heritage and those whose familial lineage is traced back to the Caribbean. As well as a separate category for the Chinese population, the study chose to include a white/British band within the study in order for controlled comparisons to be made.

The authors did not begin their project from the negative position that members of ethnic minorities had little or no interest in sport or lacked the ability or inclination to take part in sporting activities. For Verma and Darby:

the central objective of the research [was] to explore... the relationships between ethnicity, culture and gender on the one hand and participation in sport and recreation on the other... [giving] some indications as to the relative significance of ethnicity, culture and gender in determining participation in sport by people from ethnic minority groups (1994:2-3). (my parenthesis).

From this critical standpoint, a more detailed understanding of the specific workings and principle mechanics of ethnicity and culture and gender, could be definitively ordered (at least made clear), distinct from, and prior to, any attempt to situate sport on an unidentified socio-cultural landscape. Verma and Darby are themselves critical of the previous literature on sport and ethnicity that has variously ‘lumped’ South Asians together “in complete disregard for their differences of language, religion,

economic background, social customs, family structures, notions of propriety and morality, patterns of work and leisure habits" (p.7). The research was set in Greater Manchester with local authorities, in Education and Recreation and Leisure, being fully involved in outlining their positions in respect of ethnic minority participation in sport. From the findings that were gathered from this comprehensive research base, Verma and Darby were able to abstract a number of salient issues from their explorative study. As a validation of their initial standpoint that refused to accede to 'common-sense' ideas of British ethnic minority sporting indifference, the authors' study suggested that sport was as popular and as important in the lives of the various ethnic minority groups as it was for the majority white populace. There was, however, a notable gender differential that did not place sport as the central leisure activity in the lives of ethnic minority women and girls. Adherence to the Islamic faith was cited by a number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi females as an influence in their sporting inactivity. Whilst local government owned sporting and leisure facilities were far more popular than any commercially operated, privately owned outfits, white British and West Indian respondents were much more inclined to make use of the public recreation that was available. If the venues/institutions where sporting activity took place were owned by members of particular ethnic communities themselves, then those belonging to those groups were more inclined to be involved in the activities on offer. There were a small number of respondents who had been excluded from certain leisure/sporting clubs or associations because of overt racism, but significantly, substantially larger numbers of ethnic minority respondents said that they had felt

unable to attend local authority facilities due to being made to feel like “outsiders” (ibid.).

The main strength of Verma and Darby’s study is also its principle weakness. The wide and diverse ethnic spread of the respondents reduced the project’s ability to explore, in a more profound and detailed manner, the specific role of sport for particular ethnic minority communities. It was the stated purpose of the study not to exclude any significant grouping from the broad classificatory band of ‘ethnic minority’. Thus, respondents from communities ranging from West Indian to Chinese were all embraced by the research sample. Another point of commendation that unfortunately militated against in-depth analysis of isolated ethnic minority sporting associations, was Verma and Darby’s rightful insistence on avoiding the use of non-discriminate general nomenclatures, especially that of ‘Asian’ or even ‘South Asian’. By making apparent the different peoples that were being represented in the study, identifying minority groups that have previously been clumped together under the general nominal banner of ‘Asian’ or ‘South Asian’, the authors also made it virtually impossible (given the logistic constraints of their project) to partake of the type of specialised comprehensive work that would appertain to the specific sporting histories and trajectories of discrete minority communities.

Despite their marked commitment to specificity, Verma and Darby do not however, choose to categorically divide their 'Indian' classification into separate bands for Sikhs and Hindus. Whilst they do allow for respondents from these culturally disparate groups to indicate their religious affiliation, such distinction is only recognised as based in and on religion. Sikhs and Hindus have certain, finite commonalities, but they have distinct, culturally specific beliefs, lifestyle patterns, systems of social stratification and languages. To conflate the two groups in this way denies, indeed contradicts Verma and Darby's non-generalising methodological stance.

This study was predominantly concerned with the attitudes to and participation in sport amongst young people from ethnic minority communities. It was not entirely by the authors' design that all the South Asian bands were represented by a preponderance of young respondents. There is no reference to the sporting experiences of those people from ethnic minorities (in this instance, particularly those from the Indian subcontinent) who may have had extensive associations with sport in the country from which they emigrated. There is also no reference to the fact that Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain have been organising Sikh Games tournaments for over thirty years, nor to the plethora of South Asian football teams (from Punjabi-Sikh and Pakistani communities) that play in their own competitions as well as mainstream amateur leagues. It could be argued that this project may have suffered from an over-

ambitious brief. In attempting to seek the attitudes of the various ethnic minorities' on issues as varied and complex as religious adherence, cultural specificities, perceptions of ethnicity and gender, and also investigate the measures taken by sports recreation and leisure providers to meet the needs of their diverse clientele. Verma and Darby acknowledge the bipartite form of their study, but consider it necessary to view the leisure users in direct relation to the leisure providers. Whilst such an approach is highly effective in principle, the all-encompassing nature of the project (in terms of incorporating a significant number of distinct ethnic minority communities) does not allow for particularised critical portraits of what sport means to individual groups and how sports/leisure provision can be individually adapted to the precise requirements of such disparate and heterogeneous communities.

In keeping with a common methodological proclivity that situates sport within institutions and quantifiable domains of leisure and recreation, McGuire and Collins base their research project within a school setting. In *Sport, Ethnicity and Racism: The Experience of Asian Heritage Boys* (1998), McGuire and Collins outline the principle findings from the research that they carried out in two primary schools and two secondary schools in Rochdale (Lancashire) over a two-week period in 1995. It was the stated objective of the research to evince the causes behind perceived low levels of interest in school-based physical education and extra-curricular sport amongst South Asian male pupils. One of the authors' main concerns centred around

the issue of health, specifically the relative 'poor' health of South Asians as compared to other sections of European society, and how a lack of sporting activity may contribute to such a state (p.79). The first comment that needs to be made with regard to this study is concerning the choice of nomenclature used by McGuire and Collins. They use the term 'Asian Heritage' to define the ethnic affiliation of their chosen subject group. This type of label suggests an attempt on the authors' part to circumvent notions, and accusations, of indiscriminate generalisation of the various South Asian communities. Suffixing the operative 'Asian' with the qualifying 'Heritage' serves no clarifying or definitive purpose. It would have been more accurate for the study to definitively declare its pertinence to young male South Asian Muslims in Britain, instead of falsely claiming to reflect the 'experience of Asian Heritage boys'.

Following the completion of questionnaires, focus groups were conducted with selected respondents who elaborated on the topics covered in the preliminary questionnaires. It was intended for the interviewers to maintain a "strictly neutral stance" (p.82), but there is no mention of the ethnicity of the persons conducting the interviews. McGuire and Collins insist that the non-teacher status of the interviewers lends to their neutrality, but if the majority of the teachers in the schools are white, then other white figures/faces (particularly those engaged in work that is set in the school and 'academic' in nature) cannot be completely disassociated from

the school environment in the indiscriminate, spontaneous manner suggested by the authors.

While they acknowledge the effects of both institutional and public racism on the lifestyle patterns of South Asians in Britain, McGuire and Collins place greater significance and proscriptive weight on the attitudes of the parents of young South Asians, in this instance in relation to sporting involvement:

the low status afforded to physical education and sport, within the home and community, was found to be a more influential factor... [and] that education should focus more on Asian Heritage attitudes in addition to maintaining and enhancing the antiracism process (p.79).

However, the authors display little understanding of how racism has shaped the attitudes of South Asian parents, and how this represents a tautological conditioning that begins and ends with racist practices and racial prejudice. From their findings, McGuire and Collins found that South Asian parents were more inclined to encourage their children in strictly academic educational pursuits, with physical education and sport given peripheral, if any importance or significance. Without any obvious markers of South Asian sporting successes, the 'Asian Heritage' respondents pointed to those members of their communities who had achieved perceived social and financial advancement via the educational route, attaining qualifications to become

medical practitioners, doctors, lawyers, teachers or working in the civil service. This was the dominant vision of success and advancement propounded by the parents of the respondents. Whilst it is indeed true that many South Asian parents strongly encourage their children, from various ages, into gaining academic and vocational qualifications with a view to securing rewarding occupations, such encouragement cannot be characterised as a naturalised proclivity that is without predicated reasons based on wanting to secure the most stable and (at least financially) prosperous futures.

What McGuire and Collins fail to acknowledge, let alone convey, are the reasons and logic behind South Asian parents encouraging their children into careers other than sport. For young people of any background, a career in sport - one that sustains financial security for a whole family - is not guaranteed. The perpetuation of the non-sporting South Asian stereotype also worked (with greater potency in the past) to maintain a distance between South Asians and sport, a distance 'preserved' from within South Asian communities as well as from external forces. For McGuire and Collins, South Asian sporting non-involvement is a South Asian problem, not something that is primarily reducible to the dominant white majority's impact. The authors of this study have seemingly chosen to ignore the directive of Raval who, whilst criticising the methods of enquiry employed by Carrington et al. (1987) in their study of South Asian girls and sport/leisure participation, asserted that "[T]he focus

of analysis and explanation needs shifting from the Asian [sic] culture, religion and norms, to the racist structures and institutions of British society” (Raval, 1989:239).

Where the authors point out that racism “was not stated as the main reason for non-participation” (McGuire and Collins, 1998:79), they omit any expressed concern with why such a pattern of response should occur. Due recourse is made to Fleming’s (1995) work on South Asian males and school sports, highlighting the pivotal role of various forms of racism in maintaining a distance between South Asian school boys and sport, but for McGuire and Collins, through the course of their study, “there were other reasons... which shaped participation patterns [in sport] more than racism” (McGuire and Collins, 1998:81) (my parenthesis). The significance of methodological variants was not considered to have an effect on the responses gained. If, for instance, those who interviewed the South Asian boys in McGuire and Collins’ study were white, then it may have been less likely for the South Asian boys to speak of racial, and particularly racist issues openly without the fear of causing offence, or embarrassment, or indeed, without the fear of reprimand and reproach. The importance of using interviewers from the same ethnic background as the subjects has been given significant importance by other researchers (cf. Parmar, 1988; Bains et al., 1999). The schools in which the research took place were multi-ethnic schools with significantly higher numbers of South Asian pupils (the vast majority being Bengali Muslims) than white pupils. With up to 70% of the schools’ pupils being South

Asian, the threat of racial abuse is less likely. This is not simply the case of safety in numbers - there is no sizeable (of equal or greater size) 'other' group with which to compete for school-based ascendancy. Away from playground politics, with such substantial South Asian presence in the schools. South Asian pupils may have no discernible gauge by which any racially prejudiced or discriminatory practices could be indubitably recognised. These are considerations that McGuire and Collins fail to make.

McGuire and Collins' study uses a 'white' control group in a pseudo-scientific attempt to establish a normative model by which the expressed experiences of their South Asian subjects could be compared. Although one benefit of such a device is that it does allow comparison between different groups, locating and defining it as a 'control group' suggests that the experiences of this group are the norm, the recognised pattern by which everything else is calibrated. Experiences that differ from that of the control group are, by implication, deviant and non-conforming. The sporting/physical education experiences of South Asian boys cannot be measured and contextualised in direct relation with those of their white peers. The hugely divergent histories, ethnic backgrounds, experiences of racism, marginalisation, minoritisation as well as significant differences in social and personal needs combine to make such comparison ineffectual and myopic.

The conclusions that McGuire and Collins reach are not, within the narrow exploratory framework of their project, surprising, neither do they offer any new insight to the study of South Asians and sport. It is their resolution that South Asian boys do not participate in physical education to any great extent because of their parents' low opinion of sport as a secure and credible career option, and also due to the dominance of South Asian role models located in areas such as commerce, medicine and law (within families, communities and more popularly disseminated). They also site other recreational distractions such as 'hanging out', watching television and using soft drugs as diverting young boys (not just South Asians, for the white control group expressed similar experiences) from actively participating in sport. It seems that for McGuire and Collins, the superfluous symptoms of South Asian sporting non-participation need to be addressed before the causes that engender such symptoms are evinced and explored. By not investigating the reasons behind South Asian parent's negative attitude toward sport, and by paying little critical attention to the methodology of their study, they do not allow their work to achieve substantial significance.

Williams's (1994) critical portrait of *South Asians and Cricket in Bolton* represents one of the more considered studies of how particular South Asian communities have developed associations with the sport of cricket since the initial point of re-settlement in Britain, specifically the industrial Lancashire mill town of Bolton in the North

West of England. Williams provides a statistical history of Bolton's South Asian communities, using census data to chart the increase of people of South Asian descent from the 1950s through to the 1990s. He is measured and precise in his insistence on not applying a falsely homogenising gloss to his work, recognising that "[T]he Asian [sic] population of Bolton has never been socially homogenous. Culture, gender, generation, religion, language and place of origin are causes of division among Asians" (1994:57). Gujarati Hindus from India formed the largest South Asian community in Bolton, followed by Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims.

Bolton's first South Asian cricket clubs were established in the 1960s with the all-Hindu 'Bolton Indians' club being the first in 1962, and the all-Muslim 'Deane and Derby' following in 1968. Williams is careful in identifying the various religious and caste allegiances of the South Asians in Bolton. The vast majority of Hindus are from the *Vaishya varna* caste, with two thirds of the Muslims in the town are *Surti* Muslims with the remaining third *Baruchi* Muslims (ibid.). The different South Asian cricket clubs represent particular communities from within the South Asian population, and despite overt disclaimers denying any restrictive membership policy based on religious or ethnic affiliation, an ethnic specificity remains preserved at many South Asian and white cricket clubs. Whilst local league cricket in Bolton has suffered a decline in popularity and participation in recent years, the number of new South Asian clubs, almost entirely Muslim clubs, has increased quite dramatically.

with only two predominantly Hindu clubs remaining. Williams points to the highly competitive nature of all these clubs, irrespective of the level at which they may play. Indeed, this very competitive zeal has been condemned by some white teams as being somewhat gratuitous whilst praising their own teams', and their leagues' combative vigour. Despite their commitment to successful cricket (or maybe because of it), no South Asian team has been allowed to enter the 'Bolton League', widely regarded as the league with the highest standard of cricket. No South Asian team has managed to penetrate into the Bolton and District Cricket Association's First Division (a league that is just below the standard of the Bolton League), although they constitute over half the teams in the Second Division (p.59-60).

Williams's study highlighted the near ubiquitous belief amongst all the Bolton-based cricketers interviewed (South Asian and white), that "cricket promotes inter-racial contact and ethnic harmony" (p.62). Such a view does not go unchallenged by Williams who imbues such statements as containing a certain degree of "wishful thinking" (ibid.). Unlike McGuire and Collins, Williams is wholly aware of the fact that the responses of some South Asian players may have been different had they been interviewed by a South Asian (ibid.) interviewer. Williams also acknowledges that the tendency amongst South Asians in Bolton to join and play for cricket teams from their own ethnic communities is not just a reflection of their desire to play with and amongst their own kin-groups, but such a proclivity may be rooted in racist

practices that present obstacles in the path of further poly-ethnic integration not just in the cricket teams and leagues, but also in the wider social sphere. He notes how “the absence of clubs from the highest levels of cricket [in Bolton] reduces the capacity of cricket to promote the assimilation of Asians” [sic] (p.63) (my parenthesis). A number of the small Muslim cricket clubs operate from a kin-group, shared religious traditions or even ancestral South Asian village membership basis. but Williams suggests the development of a growing Muslim consciousness that may engender the amalgamation of smaller Muslim clubs uniting under one monolithic Islamic banner. The burgeoning hostility aimed toward Muslims in Bolton (not unrelated to a pervasive global Islamaphobia) has furthered the common bond propounded by certain Islamic leaders.

Williams's work on South Asians and cricket in Bolton represents a self-consciously limited scope of critical investigation. He makes clear the ethnic specificity of the South Asian groups to which his respondents/interviewees belonged. A succinctly conveyed understanding of the traditional patterns of kinship and hyper-specialised patterns of unity (based on religion or caste membership or village of descent), afford his study an authenticating dimension that informs his exposition of the various South Asian cricket clubs in Bolton. Williams's study is found wanting in its lack of any detailed analysis of the multifarious functions of the various cricket clubs, as well as the game of cricket itself, for the stated South Asian communities. Pertinent questions

that could be asked of such a study relate to the initial purpose and experiences of pioneer South Asian cricketers in Bolton in establishing all-Indian, all-Hindu or all-Muslim clubs. What was the manner in which such clubs served the purpose of confirming ethnic solidarity, or the reaffirmation of specific ethnic ties? Indeed, was such a purpose served, or intended at all? Williams is aware that the 'negative' issues such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination may not have been earnestly and openly discussed due to the interviewers being white. Acknowledging such a deficit may point to an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics that operate in this type of artificial research environment, but it may have been far more profitable (for the purposes of his study) to directly address this variable and use a researcher of the necessary South Asian descent to conduct at least some of the interviews with the appropriate South Asian cricket players. It is difficult to understand why this type of measure was not implemented, when Williams clearly shows an acute appreciation of how subject responses may have been susceptible to the influence of the interviewers perceivable ethnicity.

Another aspect afforded only fleeting reference in this work is that of the influence of religious institutions in the workings of South Asian (particularly Muslim) cricket clubs. Williams states that "[M]any Muslims are reticent about the particular traditions of Islam to which they subscribe and about their mosque affiliations" (p.60), but at the same time the response of one Muslim cricketer who tells of how the

vast majority of the players in his team attend the same mosque. suggests that religious institutional belonging does have some bearing on the membership. if not the operation of certain Muslim cricket clubs in Bolton. Whilst one Hindu cricket club has banned any talk of religion within its premises, such a proscription is itself a direct signifier of the volatile pre-eminence of this subject for certain South Asian communities. An examination of the matches played between different South Asian teams (either those with differing regional affiliations or those representing Hindu and Muslim faiths), could have proffered another incisive angle as to the part that religion plays in such encounters, as well as in the various club identities. Williams makes an allusion to the comments made by Sir Norman Tebbit as to the national allegiances of Britain's ethnic minorities (particularly from the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies), during Test matches involving England and the representative team of ancestral homelands. Noting the growing pan-Islamic consciousness emerging in Bolton, Williams does not pursue the nationalism dilemma with any great vision. It may have been interesting to find out who the Indian-Muslims in Bolton supported in international cricket and whether they followed the Indian national team or that of Pakistan (with the Pakistani team embracing a strong Islamic identity).

Generational differences in the experiences of the South Asian cricketers and club members were also omitted from analysis by Williams. Younger South Asians

sometimes have starkly opposing views, life experiences and life expectancies as compared with their elders, and the question of national belonging/identification is most contentious when viewed through such a cross-cultural, hybridised prism. There may also have been disparities in the manner in which the different generations/age-groups of South Asians played cricket in Bolton. The competitive edge described by Williams (and disparaged by some of the white respondents) that many South Asian cricketers harboured, was not identified as originating in the first group of South Asian cricketers, nor was it clear as to whether or not, or how, such combative vigour has achieved continuity in the type of cricket played by South Asian players born and raised in Bolton.

Williams's work provides a valuable account of how specific South Asian communities in Bolton have established their own cricket clubs that have endured over the course of four decades, and which have produced competitive cricket teams that have penetrated close to the upper echelons of the various local leagues. Whilst presenting the progression of these clubs in an informed and informative manner, the operational scope of Williams's work does not allow for greater detail and more extensive, issue-based analysis to be entered into. Williams never denies the presence or impact of racism within the local cricketing structures in Bolton, or in the wider social spheres in which South Asians interact with whites. But his work is limited in its capacity to elaborate on the issues that relate directly to racism and local league

cricket. This is an area of enquiry picked up on by the *Hit Racism for Six* campaign's (1996) *Hit Racism for Six – Race and Cricket in England Today* report, as well as McDonald and Ugra's (1998) *Anyone for Cricket* report.

The *Hit Racism for Six* report represents a concise compendium of brief articles that explore the nature, direction and effects of racism within cricket, and attempts to provide pro-active directives designed to combat, or at least challenge racist practices. The subjective range of the articles contained within the report covers the type and extent of racial abuse suffered by professional and amateur cricketers, through to notions of nationalism/national identity *à la* cricket and the aspects of the game's very structure. Khan's article on the Yorkshire-based *Quaid-I-Azam* cricket league. Inaugurated in 1980, the *Quaid-I-Azam* league has two divisions each consisting of twelve teams mostly made up of South Asian players. The principle premise of the league was "to give a platform for young Asians [sic], a chance to perform and show their talent and hopefully get noticed by the county [Yorkshire] circuit" (Khan, 1996:13). Although the *Quaid-I-Azam* league is has a vast majority of Pakistani-Muslim players in its teams, there are also teams that are made up of non-Muslim players. Sikh teams and those consisting of West Indians also play in the league, and there is no official barrier that prevents any team or player of non-Muslim, or Pakistani persuasion to participate in the league's competitions. Khan points out the reluctance of white cricket clubs in Yorkshire to encourage South Asians into their

institutions to play the game or use the facilities available to develop young talent. Without the co-operation of the established clubs and leagues, the local South Asian (Pakistani-Muslim) cricket-playing communities set up their own teams and the *Quaid-I-Azam* league provided the competitive forum within which they could gratify their cricketing desires/ambitions.

The Khan article is produced as the transcript form of an interview in which the opinions of the author are used in an attempt to asseverate the values and workings of the *Quaid-I-Azam* league, and to highlight the modes of disadvantage and discrimination that South Asians in Yorkshire endure in and for the game of cricket. Khan is a playing member of the Bradford based Earl Marshall cricket club which plays in the *Quaid-I-Azam* league and as such is very much aware of the league's defining principles and practices. However, owing to the form of the article, the assertions and interpretations that Khan makes in regard to the experiences, sentiments and convictions of other cricket-playing South Asians in Yorkshire are without necessary qualification. He elaborates, in a rather general fashion, as to the derogatory treatment of Pakistani Test cricket players in the British press and the effect of such vilification on Pakistani-Muslims living in Britain, in terms of their identification with their ancestral nation and the country that they consider home (p.14-15). Such observations are not substantiated by any empirical evidence, thus whilst they may represent an accurate assessment of the experiences of South Asian

cricket players and fans in Yorkshire, it stands as an uncritical journalistic account rather than a critical exposition.

McDonald and Ugra's 1998 report into 'equal opportunities and changing cricket cultures in Essex and east London', entitled *Anyone for Cricket?*, concentrates the complexities of racism in cricket in geographical and methodological terms to a greater extent than that attempted by the *Hit Racism for Six* report. It was their objective to:

identify the extent of any correlation between club affiliation and the ethnic base of a particular club. To identify the factors that inhibit black and Asian [sic] cricket clubs from affiliating to the Essex Cricket Association. To analyse the attitudes to, and perception of, the relationship between ethnicity and racism held by cricket club secretaries, players and umpires (McDonald and Ugra, 1998:I).

Questionnaires were sent out to cricket clubs within the region specified and the authors of this report found that those clubs that were not affiliated to the Essex Cricket Association (ECA) had three times more black and South Asian members than clubs that were. Questionnaires were followed up by semi-structured interviews with players/members from affiliated and non-affiliated cricket clubs representing the local white, South Asian and black communities. McDonald and Ugra found that the cricket that was played largely outside of the ECA official structures, involving

predominantly South Asian and black teams/players, was of a much more competitive nature and matches were played on urban public grounds. Cricket matches between black or South Asian teams against white teams were extremely rare, with white teams/players/clubs regarding cricket matches as much social occasions as competitive events governed by ECA officialdom. Interviews revealed that whilst black and South Asian players did not ascribe any great seriousness to the issue of racism in cricket, many could recall particular incidents when abuse, discrimination or obstruction of a racially motivated nature occurred. A significant number of black and South Asian cricketers believed that mainstream leagues used “regulations and cultural stereotypes” (ibid.) to deny them access and admittance into their official fold. Despite such official occlusion, black and South Asian players expressed an overwhelming desire to become integrated into the official structures of cricket in Essex and East London (ibid.).

Amongst the most common reasons stated for not affiliating to the ECA was that the benefits of affiliation were not substantial enough, or, in many cases, were unknown. The financial costs of affiliation were also deemed to be too excessive for some of the smaller clubs who operated on very tight budgets. One of the more significant causes that prevented cricket clubs that were made up of black and South Asian players affiliating to official structures/leagues, was their existing membership of leagues of their own. These leagues were “organised around a sense of nationhood – Caribbean

and Sri Lankan...- or even community – Gujarati, Muslim... - and not all of such clubs are small in size” (p.8). This tendency to form teams, clubs and leagues that reflect specific ethnic groupings, and are composed from these groupings, is something that has been evident in the work of Williams and Khan’s observations and insights. The creation of ethno-specific leagues is as much a reaction to the exclusion of ethnic minority teams from the mainstream structures and leagues, as it is a desire to play with and amongst teams from similar cultural backgrounds/affiliations. The inevitable drawbacks of operating outside of local cricketing officialdom include not being eligible to take advantage of the coaching courses and training schemes set up by the governing authorities concerned to identify and advance the potential of young players, and help improve the standard of local league cricket in general. The support and direction that official bodies provide are not available to cricket clubs that are not affiliated members, and so they are forced to organise their operations without any great external aid.

There was an overall consensus amongst white, black and South Asian cricket club members (of affiliated and non-affiliated clubs) that all-black and all-South Asian teams and leagues militated against the integration of ethnic minority communities into all spheres of local cricket. It was largely felt that such ethno-specificity did in fact represent a greater move toward ostensive racial segregation in cricket. McDonald and Ugra pay particular attention to the existence of separate ‘cricketing

cultures' that embody and maintain a division between white and ethnic (black and South Asian) teams in terms of their approach to the game. They found that black and South Asian teams played cricket in a highly competitive fashion and placed a greater degree of importance on winning and competing to their full abilities. From their observations of cricket matches involving teams from the black, South Asian and white communities, and through the interviews they conducted with the players, McDonald and Ugra drew the conclusion that white teams did not zealously hold the winning of matches as being the central and primary aim of playing cricket. Whilst competing well and playing to win was still part of their competitive ethos, it was not the sole reason or aspect of the cricketing occasion. For most white teams (for non-affiliated as well as affiliated outfits) cricket matches were as much social as they were sporting events, with match time refreshments laid on as well as the 'traditional' after-match socialising in club bars indulging in post-game banter. Such extra-cricketing practices were deemed to be an essential part of the tradition of playing the game. This was the perception of many white teams, and many also expressed a certain degree of disapproval at the fact that many South Asian teams did not partake of the social indulgences that other white teams did. As the authors of the report point out, it is not simply a case of being unwilling to be part of social functions: South Asian and black players/teams, do not have the same standard of facilities that many of the white clubs take for granted. While many white clubs have privately owned grounds with pavilions, changing rooms, showers, refectories, lounges and bars, black and South Asian teams are required to use public grounds where little or no provisions are available for social activities, indeed, players are often required to

change in the open or even behind bushes (p.14). The unavailability of such facilities precipitates an abstinence from the associated 'tradition' of post-match socialising. There is however, the real issue of some Muslim clubs avoiding such functions due to Islamic prohibition of alcohol consumption. Without the side-distraction of the peripheral activities of cricket matches, South Asian and black teams concentrate on their main purpose of playing competitive cricket. The urban, highly competitive game played by the ethnic minority black and South Asian teams represents an alternative cricketing culture to that which forms and defines the experience of white teams and clubs. For these outfits, playing in a competitive manner was also part of their sporting mentality, but not to the same degree of adherence and concentration as their black and South Asian counterparts. The near-idyllic image of the genteel village-green cricket match with lemonade, cucumber sandwiches, afternoon tea and after-match festivities is, according to McDonald and Ugra's findings, very much an operative ideal that many white cricket clubs attempt to reconstruct, perpetuate and zealously protect.

The *Anyone For Cricket?* report is not solely concerned with experiences of South Asian cricketers. It seeks to explore the way in which local cricket is played and regarded by black and white players also. McDonald and Ugra do not assume any departing position that would look to prove or disprove any pre-set suppositions. It was the aim of their project to evince the reasons and conditions behind the non-

affiliation of black and South Asian clubs to the official cricketing structures in East London and Essex. They found that such affiliation was beyond the financial reach of many ethnic minority clubs, who were smaller in size and structure than the white teams, and the benefits of affiliation were not made wholly apparent to these clubs, or were thought to be insufficient for the related cost. Whilst there was limited accounts from respondents of racial abuse, or racist practice, McDonald and Ugra elucidated that, “[W]hilst the culture of ‘English cricket’ may not be explicitly racist, it can lead to a culture of racial exclusion, racial stereotyping, and, to a lesser extent, racial abuse of black and Asian [sic] cricket players” (p.55). It is clear from the views of some of the white respondents in the study that this type of racial stereotyping does occur and it is not restricted to cricketing areas. In cricket, South Asians are regarded as ‘wristy’ players, meaning that as batsman, they use their wrists much more prolifically and purposely in order to control the bat and the shots they play, and in bowling terms, South Asians have been regarded as amongst the finest spin bowlers in the game (Bisham Bedi, Abdul Quadir and more recently, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh and Murali Muralitharan are great South Asian exponents of the art of spin bowling). This image of South Asian cricketers is held by white and black players in local leagues in Britain. The particular competitive zeal with which South Asians play local league cricket is perceived by many white players as being quite contrary to the traditional ‘English’ sporting spirit of the game, which places lesser emphasis on winning and more on the enjoyment of the game. Outside of the cricketing domain, South Asian teams are regarded by white teams as unsociable, with religion barring their participation in the non-playing, alcohol-related indulgences of cricket events.

Unlike Williams's (1994) study of South Asian cricket in Bolton, McDonald and Ugra do not provide any historical information as to the ethno-cultural backgrounds of the minority communities over which they cast a critical eye. There is little discussion as to the specific ethnic groups (either black or South Asian) that are referred to, or of the divergent histories and experiences that they embody. A 'note on terminology' is given at the beginning of the report, where an attempt to clarify the different 'communities' that are included in the work and also to justify the use of the term 'cultures' as they are formed through cricketing pursuits. It is here that this study's main criticism has to be made. Without any substantial explanations/expositions of the 'cultures' and social moorings and workings of the different subject groups of the study, it is difficult to hold the 'cricketing cultures' that McDonald and Ugra elaborate upon in any great credence. We are not allowed an insight into particularities of the individual communities concerned, there is no definitive division of the black and South Asian minority groups and so the qualities ascribed to them *à la* cricket, are done so superficially and without contextualisation. McDonald and Ugra's report has no place for descriptions of the various South Asian communities, and thus we are not aware as to whether the 'Asian' teams/players they refer to are of Sikh, Muslim, Hindu or even Christian persuasion. The authors are themselves conscious of the fact that they only managed to achieve a low 13% return on the questionnaires that were sent out to the various cricket clubs. With an average return of such postal surveys at 35%, their return was less than half of the average figure. One reason given for such limited response was that the questionnaires were distributed via the ECA mailing list along with their official bulletins/newsletters. The

unaffiliated clubs, whilst receiving material from the ECA (and the questionnaires) returned significantly fewer questionnaires than affiliated clubs, which may have pointed to a reluctance amongst the unaffiliated to partake of any survey that was ‘sanctioned’, or at least associated with, the ECA.

McDonald and Ugra’s extensive survey of the opinions and experiences of South Asian, black and white cricket players, officials and governors, represents sound methodological observance and independent substantiation. Yet, whilst detailed investigation into factors contributing to the official affiliation and non-affiliation of cricket clubs serves a specified purpose, without contextual provision that allows such findings to be placed within a social, cultural and historical framework, the work remains limited.

Fleming (1995) attempts to partially fill the chasm that exists in this area of sports/South Asian diasporic studies, without reneging on due scholarly obligation.

‘Home and Away’: Sport and South Asian Male Youth is the culmination of Fleming’s three-year research project undertaken in collaboration with the Greater

London and South East Regional Sports Council.⁹ Fleming is solely concerned with the sporting experiences of young South Asian *males*, and he acknowledges the dangers of not granting issues of gender difference in sport (especially with reference to ethnicity) separate study and coverage. Fleming's research environment was a poly-ethnic, inner-city, north London comprehensive school for which he uses the pseudonym 'Parkview School'.

Fleming offers relatively detailed historical accounts of the role of sport for the different religious and cultural groups of the Indian subcontinent. As one of the more vociferous critics of 'false universalism', Fleming differentiates between the sporting histories and experiences of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

The centrality of racism(s) in the lives of young South Asians, particularly within a sporting frame of reference, is one of Fleming's principle concerns. Outlining racism's broad multiformed effects and mechanisms by way of a precursor to the critical survey of racism's impact in the varying echelons of British sport, he highlights the absence of South Asians from professional sporting spheres. Fleming

⁹ An early summarised version of Fleming's research entitled 'Sport, Schooling and Asian Male Youth Culture' was published in Jarvie, G. (ed.) (1991b) *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity*. This chapter

contests the notion that due to the success of black British (and American) sports stars, sport is free of racism. arguing that, “the sporting successes of Afro-Caribbeans indicate that they are being denied access to opportunities in other spheres of life in a racist society” (p.42). The invisibility of South Asians from the high profile world of professional sport does not mean that they do not experience racism in the sporting field. Whilst there “is considerably less evidence of racism directed towards, or experienced by them... [M]uch of it is anecdotal, but no less valid for that” (p.44). In order to add to this exiguous body of evidence corresponding to the South Asian experiences of sports-related racism, Fleming turns to his former guise as a schoolteacher and was able to gain entry into Parkview School under the working pretence of a new P.E teacher.

Fleming worked to achieve some degree of familiarity, trust and even comradeship with some of the South Asian male pupils at Parkview School and also gained access to the leisure/sports centres that served the local community and which were variously frequented by the pupils of the school. Through the course of his investigation, Fleming identified how different sub-groups within the South Asian male population of the school responded to their social, educational, domestic and sporting environment, and how these milieus impacted on their conditions. The

represented a precis of the Fleming’s study that was published in more complete form in 1995. It is the latter that allows for a more holisitic critique of his work to be made.

‘Victims’¹⁰ were the second largest South Asian male band that Fleming defined. they were a group marked by their feelings of estrangement and persecution from the dominant white society within and outside of school. a diffident negativity expressed by one ‘Victim’ respondent thus: “I don’t like this school because people are picking on me” (p.70). Not wanting to put themselves in a position in which there was a possibility of abuse or ridicule, the ‘Victims’ chose to refrain from fully active involvement in school sporting activities. Their reluctance to conform to, or partake of the cultural forms of the hegemonic white society in which they lived, was clearly marked by their insistence on speaking their own particular mother-tongue language amongst their own group during school time as well as away from it. The ‘Victims’ consisted solely of Bangladeshi Muslims, who either came to Britain as young children, or were born to newly arrived Bangladeshi parents who relocated to Britain much later than the initial, and concentrated wave of South Asian immigrants who began to settle *en masse* in this country from the late 1950s. For this group of young Bangladeshi Muslims, sport represented an enjoyable respite from the internal and external conflicts of classroom-based work. According to Fleming, for the ‘Victims’, parental pressure to accede to ‘traditional’ (Bangladeshi-Islamic) cultural and religious edicts, was the most fundamental influence on the nature of their everyday existence. With institutionalised western sport falling outside of those strict ‘traditional’ parameters, it was regarded by the ‘Victims’ as disposable and non-essential. The lack of sporting involvement by the ‘Victims’ worked against the development of their technical skills in various games and sports. The taunts and

¹⁰ The label ‘Victims’ (along with all the other referential tags that Fleming uses to define/describe the different sub-groups he identifies) is entirely conceived and perceived by Fleming himself. These

ridicule to which they were subjected, on account of limited sporting prowess, engendered a socialised aversion to sport amongst this marginalised band.

The 'Boffins' were numerically the smallest sub-group identified by Fleming. They were characterised by their firm commitment to education, to classroom work above all other activities. Coerced by their parents to place educational advancement at the forefront of their developmental agenda, the 'Boffins' enjoyed sport and participated fully in physical education classes. However, even if talent, enthusiasm and promise was shown for a particular sport, 'Boffins' would be dissuaded from participating in extra-curricular sport by parental fear that such gratuitous sporting endeavour could adversely effect their academic performance.

Possibly the most complex group specified by Fleming's work is that of the 'Street-kids'. These were South Asian youths who had rejected schooling and education as institutionalised forms of white oppression, and who "harboured strong commitments to traditional, religious values and cultural mores" (p.88-89). They formed a strong, and readily identifiable gang image-identity, with their 'uniform' of baggy fitting clothes and ski-jackets they distinguished themselves from their peers. They drew

terms were not used by any of the groups to which they referred.

heavily from African-Caribbean popular youth street culture particularly in terms of their dress sense and their colloquial language, and although they did not try to dilute or deny their ethnic heritage (p.89).

The 'Street-kids' did as their name suggests: they 'hung around' the streets, doing little other than loiter (their only intent being to loiter and pass time). Although they often played truant from school to hang around the streets, and when they were in school, they were inclined to be disruptive, uncooperative and troublesome, the 'Street-kids' did tend to be involved in a lot of active sports, particularly football. The majority of such sporting participation occurred outside of school time and school-based physical education, outside of the school's physical parameters and in the informal, non-institutional (as perceived by the 'Street-kids') environment of the local recreation park. This band of South Asian youths did take part in school P.E lessons, but did so with the intention of being difficult and disruptive.

Football was the most popular sport amongst the 'Street-kids', and many of them showed themselves to be talented and competent players. Their footballing experience was marked by informality, and quite apart from 11-a-side games with full teams, goalposts, corner-flags, nets etc (p.91). The way they played the game also represented an ulterior ethos, whereby a 'winning at all costs' mentality was frowned upon in favour of a less competitive approach which allowed them to show off their

skills and indulge in exhibitionism. Although many of the 'Street-kids' were good enough to have played for the school football teams, they chose not to do so. This was as much to do with not wanting to put themselves through extra work, and not being interested "in all the training and going to away games and that" (ibid.) as it was as deliberately shunning institutional authority. The 'Street-kids's reaction to overt racism is markedly more direct and reactive than that of any other group in Fleming's study:

'The 'Street-kids' were hostile to any remarks made with racist intent, and used to get into numerous fights over this. They had all acquired a reputation as fighters, and hence did not get insulted with the frequency they used to' (p.90).

This type of enforced intolerance of racism can be seen as very much part of the gang-ethos where protecting the group's standing, street 'respect' and 'hard' image is of great importance. Cowering down to racist thugs, or being seen to allow them to use racist language without punishment or retribution, would send the wrong signals to others that shared the same space as the 'Street-kids'. None of the 'Street-kids' expressed any desires or ambitions to pursue a career in sport professionally, explaining that parental drives toward more secure jobs (not necessarily in occupations requiring extensive training or qualifications) dissuaded them against sport.

The 'Straights' were the final group of young South Asian males from Parkview School identified by Fleming. They were primarily conformers who did not endeavour to cause disruption or behave uncooperatively. There was a strong tendency amongst the families of the 'Straights', stemming from paternal influence, to effectively integrate, if not assimilate into British culture, and there existed a commonly perceived idea of how to be British. Such a position was articulated by the father of a 'Straight': "It doesn't matter if Asian [sic] don't keep some of their culture. If it matters to them, they shouldn't have come here in the first place. You've got to adapt to people here" (p.80). Again, parental exhortation toward academic achievement with a view to vocational prosperity is a potent factor in the aspirations of these young South Asians. Sport, especially a career in sport, was considered wholly inappropriate, as it was regarded as having low prestige and of little social status, since it does not (in the opinion of the 'Straights' parents) engage intellectual faculties, unlike more 'orthodox' vocational pursuits. There was no forthright, combative treatment of racial abuse like that displayed by the 'Street-kids', the 'Straights' were much more inclined to "succumb to the apparent futility of confrontation, and accepted it [racism] with self-imposed tolerance" (p.81). Despite regular and wholesome participation in school-based P.E, the 'Straights' did not find the time or the opportunity to take part in sports outside of the school. P.E. classes were held somewhat ambivalently by the 'Straights'. On the one hand, they enjoyed taking part in school sports and appreciated the real benefits of such activity, but on the other, they were also acutely aware of how sport acted as a confrontational arena in which racial tensions were played out. As one 'Straight' respondent explained: "If I

am a goalkeeper, and I let in a goal, people say, 'Look you fucking 'Paki'. you can't do anything' – that happens even at school" (p.84). Ultimately, sport was not of any great importance to the 'Straights'. Their parents, particularly the fathers, perceived it to be an unnecessary distraction from more worthy pursuits, and thus did little to encourage their sons in anything relating to sport.

The context/constituents of Fleming's study proffered the establishment and identification of the discrete sub-groups of young South Asian males, who were, according to Fleming, united by the common denominator of the experience of racism (p.92). Irrespective of the group to which they belonged, all the different South Asian males shared this experience, although they had varying methods of coping with or confronting such abuse. Fleming is insistent on disavowing any thematic or procedural practices that do not take full consideration of the diversity of South Asians, insisting that: "[T]he recognition of heterogeneity among South Asians is of paramount importance to an understanding of the role that sport plays in South Asian cultures" (p.96). He then proceeds to criticise the narrow conceptualisation of 'sports participation' which posits South Asians as under-represented in sport, using McPherson et al. (1989) to define the accepted notion of sport as being "structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based and ludic" (pp.15-17) (quoted in Fleming, 1995:125). The majority of the sporting activities of the South Asian males at Parkview School took place outside of the conventionally defined parameters of

recognised sport, and so would not be acknowledged in ‘official’ surveys. Fleming is also critical of the ‘Eurocentric’ and ‘paternal’ viewpoints of sports providers (local authority) who misunderstand the needs of the various South Asian communities and persist in a “typically white British middle-class perspective on sport” (ibid.).

For Fleming, the basic problem with multicultural physical education is that it attempts the “gargantuan task” of trying to teach about other cultures (p.128). He also points to the proliferation of cultural, racial and sporting stereotypes by which some of those responsible for sports provision/teaching for South Asian communities order their treatment of, and approach toward South Asians. Fleming insists that it is not a ‘multiculturalist’ perspective that is required in physical education, but moreover, it is an anti-racist approach that needs to be systemically implemented and regulated:

teachers should be sensitive (and sensitised) to individual needs, and be disabused of the prevalent and enduring stereotypic notions attached to different cultural groups (p.129).

A methodological criticism that must be levelled at Fleming, and one that he makes due recourse to himself, concerns his position as a white male researcher, conducting research into South Asian lifestyle patterns and interviewing South Asian respondents. Fleming makes clear his position by adopting “the stance of a white anti-racist” (p.67) with the central thesis of his analysis being that “it is whites who must

confront their prejudices and discriminatory practices, and work conducted by white anti-racists has an important contribution to make to that" (ibid.). Aligning himself as a 'white anti-racist', imbues and indeed endows Fleming's work with a specific cause and reflexive positionality. As a white researcher, no matter how profound or how earnest his anti-racist position was, Fleming would still have been seen first and foremost as white, as non-South Asian. The fact of his whiteness is further compounded by his 'official' in-school role as a P.E teacher and a figure of institutional authority. More than his representation of established authority, as a white researcher/teacher, South Asian respondents/subjects would immediately have a racial binary set in place in which they formed the minoritised 'other' to the normalised majority as represented by the white researcher. Discussing issues of racism, and divulging intricacies about domestic/religious cultural practices would have been reticently, if not superficially, engaged in by the South Asian pupils at Parkview School. In a research environment in which Fleming 'studied' South Asian pupils, an unequal dyadic relationship would, without hesitation, establish itself as the organising *modus operandi*.

Cashmore (1982b) has suggested that researchers from the particular ethnic group of those subjects being researched, would be able to produce a more informed and 'authentic' study than a researcher from outside of the ethno-cultural band of the investigation. Fleming counteracts this position by invoking anthropological

arguments that advance the notions of social distance, and 'cultural-outsiderism', which imbue such work with a critical subjectivity that may not be observed, to the same degree, by a researcher whose ethnic affiliation deemed him/her to be an 'insider' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Iganski. 1990). Fleming builds on this theoretical stance by insisting that it is not essential to have experienced a phenomenon (such as racism) in order to understand it (Fleming, 1985:66), arguing that the previous sociological works carried out by white researchers into various dimensions of ethnic minority experiences, have been of great value and importance, and to deny their credence on the grounds of an ethnic incompatibility of researcher-subject group, would be unjust and foolish. Whilst this is a valid point, contention lies in the perception, moreover, the reception by ethnic minority subjects of the white researcher engendering the establishment and the operation of an unequal power relationship, a relationship in which the white researcher may not be able to achieve a suitable level of trust and identification with the minoritised subject group, and one that may encourage greater levels of forthright candour and uninhibited, uncensored expression. Anderson (1993) states that, "[M]inority scholars are also less likely to experience distrust, hostility and exclusion within minority communities" (p.41). but she also acknowledges that uncritical bias that may become implicit in research carried out by researchers of the same ethnic background as the subject group. There are some aspects of ethnic minority cultures that a respondent may feel to be somewhat embarrassing or difficult to explain to a researcher who was not of the same ethnic background.

Fleming's work is limited by the physical constraints of the environment in which he is able to 'view' sporting participation. Sporting involvement and participation then, was gauged by the relationship that the subjects (the South Asian male pupils) had with school sports, i.e. P.E, and the associated sports centre. Whilst Fleming did not place exaggerated significance on attendance levels and frequency of participation (in P.E and at the centre), he was only able to analyse South Asian sporting experiences/associations by selecting and utilising institutional, 'officially' recognised arenas within which such analyses could be conducted. The issue of confining sports participation to the regular spheres as instituted, governed and occupied by the dominant white majority, is linked to the previously debated matter concerning the white researcher studying an ethnic minority group. If the white researcher is unaware of other, ulterior modes/avenues of sporting participation, those that are outside of the conventional, and unknown to the white majority, then he/she is at a distinct disadvantage in terms of collecting entirely accurate data without visiting or identifying these alternative ethnic sporting arenas and accounting for their effects.

Believing South Asians to have deep-rooted sporting pedigrees, and taking from the emergence of British born South Asians in the professions, Fleming's faith in South Asians telling of their own sporting associations is tempered by his discovery that, "sport has a low status in many South Asian communities in Britain, and even the

scientific study of sport is often seen as little more than ‘play’...” (p.66). It is the purpose of this study to apply serious scientific study to the Punjabi-Sikh sporting experience.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING LABELS - A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In popular and academic debates focused around sport and race, the term ‘race’ is reduced to, or conflated with being black. This reductive proclivity may in fact have political precedence whereby a consensus has emerged in recent times amongst race equality professionals and activists, “that the term ‘black’ should be used to describe all those who because of their race are unfavourably treated within British society” (Modood 1988:397). The absence of any significant number of South Asians (across the different communities that such a label embraces) from the most exposed echelons of professional British sport, is in stark contrast to the highly prominent visibility of an African-Caribbean/black-British presence. Thus when referring to black footballers, a particular racialised image-identity is assigned for as Modood states, the term ‘black’ “has a historical and current meaning such that it is powerfully evocative of people of sub-Saharan African origins, and all other groups, if evoked at all, are secondary” (1994:89). Reference to South Asians and sport remains an esoteric enigma. ‘South Asian’ is effectively a nomenclatural indulgence of academia that necessarily differentiates the peoples of the Indian sub-continent (or those of sub-continental origin) from those originating from, or resident of, south east Asia encompassing China, Japan and associated regions. ‘South Asian’ and ‘south east

Asian' are both convenient umbrella terms that themselves allow for a degree of slippage and over-simplification. 'Asians and sport' in the British context has nothing to do with those individuals and communities from Japan or China or North or South Korea (especially in professional football). the Asian identity invoked here is one with "...some share in the heritage of the civilisation of the old Hindustan prior to British conquest. Roughly, it is those people who believe that the Taj Mahal is an object of their history" (Modood, 1988:397). Such an attempt as Modood's to draw together a markedly divergent number of disparate groups cannot be unproblematically adopted. As Bhatt (1994, 1997) points out. Modood, in trying to de-couple Asianess from blackness, inadvertently essentialises South Asian identity with such a definition. Indeed the Taj Mahal as a symbol of Moghal rule in India represents Moghal domination over a variety of religious and ethnic groups on the subcontinent. Punjabi Sikhs in particular endured a volatile and bloodily hostile relationship with Moghal rulers, and fought a series of sanguinary wars to preserve their own Sikh religion and identity. Contemporaneously, the Sikh Golden Temple (*Harmandhir Sahib*) at Amritsar in the Punjab, stands as the definitive edifice which serves to emblematised and embody a specific Sikh heritage. Indeed it was the storming of this holy site of pilgrimage and worship, and its ensuing shelling by the Hindu-dominated Congress Party Indian Government, that crystallised the whole movement for a separate Sikh nation *Khalistan*. The political movement that is struggling for Punjabi independence from the rest of India, spearheaded by the Akali Dal Party, has constructed its social and political agenda around the desire and need of Punjabi-Sikhs to have a separately recognised nation-state of their own, bringing

with its self-regulating autonomy and a discernible Sikh collective identity. This is an identity that is wholly distinguished and distinguishable from the Indian nation, the Hindu majority of India and its religiously defined cultural traditions.¹¹

Whilst the struggle for the separate Sikh nation of Khalistan occupies the time, money and energies of religiously based political organisations in Britain, the issue of Sikh independence has wider resonance in more popular circles and assumes a more local significance. In Britain, Sikhs are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group separate from other 'Indians'. Hazareesingh (1986) does not hold faith in any call for narrower terms of definition. He points to the obvious and inadequate compromise of labels such as 'Asian' to define the variety of peoples from the Indian subcontinent, and instead insists on the shared 'Indian' heritage of all South Asians:

I would suggest that all South Asian people are of Indian descent just as certainly and logically as all Black people are of African descent. The concept of 'Indian' does not negate regional/religious variations but represents a broader cultural definition based on a commonality of shared meanings and experiences which the twin processes of imperialism and racism have sought to conceal from and hence deny Indian people. It refers *not* to nationality in a contemporary sense but to culture in a historical sense bringing the light of history to bear on our present experience (his italics) (p.6).

¹¹ See Tatla (1993) *The Politics of Homeland – A Study of Ethnic Linkages and Political Mobilisation Amongst Sikhs in Britain and North America*.

Hazareesingh's reasoning for adopting a pan-Indian nominal identity is that it invokes and embraces a transcendent historical unity, an anti-imperialist historical unity. He perceives the nomenclature 'Indian' as representative of a shared tradition in the arts, science and philosophy, but crucially, he fails to address the points of Indian subcontinental history when differentiation and disjunction have predominated, and have served to create divergent communities that distinguish themselves linguistically, culturally and religiously, with the latter of these commanding the most urgent drive for individualised group identification/dominance. With the bloody historical antipathy between Hindus and Muslims, then Muslims and Sikhs, and most recently, Sikhs and Hindus, the blanket use of the term 'Indian' to categorise and conflate all these varied peoples is wholly inadequate if not indeed offensive. Mason (1990) is rightfully cautious of adopting the use of generalised labels that could cause offence and stir resentment amongst those who they purport to define: "[T]he freedom to devise analytic categories appropriate to the task in hand should not mean that we use terms to designate them which are unnecessarily offensive" (p.129).

Over the last decade it has become increasingly clear that in Britain, the definitive classification 'Indian' is regarded as being wholly ineffectual and quite insensitive. The British Sikh Federation, based in Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, have been amongst the leading campaigners for the official recognition of a separate and distinct British 'Sikh' identity. They, along with other politically driven Sikh

organisations such as the Sikh Youth Federation and the *Babar Khalsa*, have actively sought to differentiate the Sikh people in Britain from other. Hindu or Muslim Indians.

For Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain, the process by which they were assigned the classification 'Indian' was effected and enforced on them from above, from official government channels, and it was a process that was initially closed to their input and involvement. For the majority of white people in Britain, the sight of a Punjabi-Sikh person, or a Pakistani Muslim or an Indian Hindu is simply framed within the broad defining sphere of 'Asian'. Unless their association with a particular South Asian involved greater degrees of intimacy and familiarity, there would be no pressing demand for more particularised specification. Banton (1997) contends that ethnic minority group labels are imbued with greatest significance when they serve to illustrate deviance from the majority's perception of what is the norm. The term 'Indian' represents a 'normalised' holistic band within which Punjabi-Sikhs are subsumed without hesitation and without regard for their own distinctiveness. Whilst Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims and even East African Asian all command separate definitive classifying bands of their own, Punjabi-Sikhs are still all branded as 'Indian'. The branding of Punjabi-Sikhs, indeed the conflation of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain as 'Indian' as opposed to 'Punjabi-Sikhs'. or just 'Sikhs', is not merely a pedantic whim or stubborn, fastidious insistence; it is, "the choice between a political

realism which accords dignity to ethnic groups on their own terms and a coercive ideological fantasy” (Modood, 1988:397).

‘British Asian’, or most ubiquitously, ‘Asian’, are the more widely used and accepted group labels that refers to people of Indian sub-continental descent, particularly within the more populist circles such as British sport. The signing of Chinese international players by First Division club Crystal Palace in 1998 has engendered a particular ‘Asian’ involvement in the professional game, a south east Asian involvement, further highlighting the referential inadequacies of ‘Asian’ as a suitably accurate defining label. The specific South Asian group which forms the focus of this study consists of those peoples who can directly trace their origins back to the north Indian state/region of the Punjab (however immediate or distant that genealogical lineage may be), and all of whom share (with varying degrees and modes of adherence) in the Sikh religious faith, or at least have a common cultural heritage that is predicated along the religious lines of Sikhism. This is the particular South Asian band referred to as Punjabi-Sikhs.

CHAPTER 3

TELLING TALES – THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researching the phenomenon of sport in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs entails a cross-discursive methodology providing a contextual frame of reference which works to ensure that the “research does not exist in a vacuum” (Blauner and Wellman, 1973:314). For the sporting experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain to be cogently explored, the history and place of sport in the lives of Sikhs in the Punjab has to be given precursive attention. The dearth of documented material relating to such an area of investigation meant that greater flexibility and ingenuity was required to attain information concerning sport in the Punjab. I had established contacts in Britain who were prominent players in the South Asian sports organisations in this country (particularly in Birmingham and Coventry) and my association with a South Asian football team from Coventry (Keaneston Rovers) led to my accompanying them to the Punjab in February 1997, on a month-long footballing tour of the region.

There exists a body of works which pay critical attention to the re-location of Sikhs emigrating from their native Punjab to re-settle in Britain (Desai, 1963; Helweg,

1979; Hiro, 1967; James, 1974; Kalra, 1980). However, such accounts are marked by an agent-less dehumanisation of their subject matter. The authorial voice of the researcher/writer is conferred with a legitimating authority that speaks of the immigrant Punjabi-Sikh (or South Asian) experience, without allowing the voices of the immigrant communities to speak for and of themselves. The work of the Sikh Family History Project in Manchester stands as one of the few examples of directly using the lived experiences of South Asian immigrants, as translated through their own words, to (re)present the negotiated dynamics of their existential conditions. *Speaking For Ourselves – Sikh Oral History* (1985) is a compilation - put together and annotated by researcher and community worker, Fitzgerald - of personal chronicles that are moored to a specific location (Manchester) with the voices of real people narrating their own stories. With an absence of any account of how sport affected the lives of Punjabi-Sikh settlers in Britain in the established, documented texts, it was necessary for me to compile the sporting history of this community by allowing the community itself to (re-)tell the role that sport played in their lives. In *Speaking For Ourselves – Sikh Oral History*, Fitzgerald impugns the position that the study of history has adopted, challenging the historical orthodoxy that neglects the histories of those peoples marginalised by domineering hegemonic societies/groups:

History is about people: what they have done; what they have dreamed of and fought for; where and why events occurred and how individuals and communities effected them. One of the objectives [of *Speaking For Ourselves – Sikh Oral History*] is to contribute to the growing fund of material about people, such as ethnic minorities, women and working people who have been neglected by traditional historians (my parenthesis) (p.5).

The deficit of the mention of sport in published works attempting to (un/re)cover the history and experiences of South Asians in Britain seemingly deny that South Asians had any association with sport at all. Yet my childhood memories and the experiences conveyed to me by elder family members (principally my father and uncles) point to a steadfast denial of such a charge. The history of Punjabi-Sikh settlement in Britain throws forth a sporting tradition and engagement that has culpably escaped documentation, perpetrated by historians, sociologists and ethnologists, as well as the Punjabi-Sikh community itself. Oral history is a suitable methodological means by which this neglected sporting tradition can be recaptured and told anew.

It was a relatively uncomplicated task to locate Punjabi-Sikhs who had direct experience of sport within their community in Britain. The *Shaheedi* Games tournaments were the focal, crystallised incarnation of Punjabi-Sikh sporting endeavour and the history and evolution of these tournaments represent the same of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain. The first *Shaheedi* Games tournament was held in Birmingham and organised by one of the first Sikh temples in Britain. It was through contacts and connections at the temple that I met with and spoke to individuals who were pivotal in the early years of the *Shaheedi* Games.¹² For the purposes of critical anonymity I shall use the invented pseudonym ‘Sikh Temple Shelby’ (or GNG Shelby) to refer to this *Gurdwara*; the Coventry-based football club that also lent

itself to the methodological universe of this study shall similarly be known as ‘Keaneston Rovers Football Club’ (or simply, ‘Rovers’). The willingness of both the Sikh temple and the football club to contribute to this project was not entirely unproblematic. The *Gurdwara* was an established institution whose very name was etched in the popular history of Punjabi-Sikh settlement in Britain. This religious institution’s primary role in the instigation of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments was a source of pride to those associated with the *Gurdwara*, especially in its immediate locale. Thus anonymising the *Gurdwara* was close to a putative act of denial. The Sikh Temple Shelby representatives who contributed to this work did not demand anonymity – in fact, they expressed pride in the fact of their temple’s involvement in the Punjabi-Sikh sporting history being documented and acknowledged. Since this is not a ‘pure’ historical study, but instead a work that seeks to abstract personal and private experiences, protecting the identity of the respondents and the institution to which they belong is a scholastic courtesy and professional obligation. For the players/affiliates of the Punjabi-Sikh football team too, the attribution of their real names to the data they supplied was not of any intolerable personal discomfort for them, yet it was again necessary to disguise their true identities and confer them with pseudonyms. Anonymising the study also removes it from the realms of the specific and places it in a more generalised domain, where reasoned extrapolations concerning wider Punjabi-Sikh sporting experiences can be more readily made. Respondents (from both institutions) almost unilaterally valued the declaration and exposition of Punjabi-Sikh sporting experiences and history above notions of confidentiality. The

¹² My family has attended this *Gurdwara* since my grandfather arrived in Britain in the late 1950s. My father has been an active committee member of this institution for twenty years and has also been its

football club players and affiliates served as the pivotal subjects of my study, purportedly representing the British population of sporting Punjabi-Sikhs. “Negotiating an entrée” was not as problematic for me as it was for Fleming (1995:53), who had to work through official, local authority channels in order to set himself in place at the school in which he was to carry out his ethnographic study. Such an official position (that of a schoolteacher) is one of the more obvious and ‘manageable’ research roles that a social researcher can assume, but it carries with it certain social baggage that can impede or hinder such research (Mac an Ghail, 1991; Pollard, 1985). The informality of my relationship with subjects brought about its own complex relational dynamics. Whilst my entrée into the ranks of this ‘institution’ was straightforward, once ‘inside’, I had to clarify who I was, my position, outline what I wanted from the respondents, how I was going to go about gathering information from them, what their role was and how it all fitted together in the grand scheme of my project. Without this type of essential preliminary clarification, it would not have been possible to achieve an honest working relationship with the subjects and it is doubtful that I would have gained their trust if they were not aware of the precise mechanics and variables that controlled our artificial interaction.¹³ According to Burgess, “the relationship between the researcher and those who are researched is crucial” (1984:107), and initial familiarity was not sufficient to create a climate of trust within which the subjects could freely convey their experiences and express their emotions/desires/ambitions in an uninhibited and assured manner. To

vice-president. This made ‘accessing’ the temple somewhat less fraught.

¹³ I refer to my association with the subjects as ‘artificial’ for I was creating for myself a role within their fold that previously did not exist and one that had no real contributory purpose in the body/course of their operation.

this end, I spent as much time in the company of the members of the club as was possible. In methodological terms, my role ‘in the field’ was ostensibly that of a participant observer. Whilst acknowledging that to varying degrees, “all social researchers are participant observers” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2000:1), my participation was relatively thorough. I was with and among the players/respondents on almost every gathering in respect of club matters (including accompanying social gatherings). Spending time in the club clique afforded greater familiarity with and from them, which in turn diluted their view of me as an outside, academic agent. I was initially and jokingly referred to as ‘the reporter’, stemming from the mocking (although not necessarily erroneous) assertion that I was a recorder/reporter of the club’s affairs as well as the players’ thoughts. Indeed, a certain aspect of this casual ‘reporter’ tag seemingly influenced some of the players’ relationships with me. I was, at times, viewed as being someone who was not an official club affiliate and so supposedly without bias toward or against the club, but also as a person who knew the team and the individuals, who understood the tensions amongst some factions, as well as someone who could offer informed yet impartial opinion. It was my fortune to have been able to participate and observe in this manner. My unofficial, yet fairly inculcated position with the club helped to engender a critically intimate association with many of the respondents.

The 1997 *Shaheedi* Games tournaments (held from mid-May through to the end of July) were used as a ‘natural’ setting for my interaction with respondents. The tournaments (held over the course of a weekend at locations across England, including: Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Gravesend, Derby, Bradford, Barking, Leamington Spa, Reading and Slough, in local council-run recreation grounds and parks with full-size football pitches) provided a time and space when all respondents were gathered in one place, in a sporting environment and participating in sport, as well as to socialise in informal milieu, such as pub or in respondents’ homes, afterwards. Whilst such a communal environment was suitable for group discussions and observing the group dynamics and during the most intense period of competition in the footballing calendar, it was not always practically possible to engage in in-depth interviewing that was required in certain circumstances.

I was first introduced to the club members in November 1996, at a social/leisure club owned by the family of one of the established players. Although I did not officially play for Keaneston Rovers (or for any other team), I trained with them on a fairly regular basis. The team usually trained once a week, on Tuesday evenings (twice if facilities could be booked and important games were forthcoming), using the outdoor facilities (astro-turf pitches) available at a nearby comprehensive school. By the beginning of 1997, I was a regular at training sessions with the club. I did not play in any official game for the club in any competition because I was not registered as an

affiliate with them, either with the local football association and amateur league, or with the *Khalsa* Football Federation. General stretching exercises, stamina and speed work, as well as ball-control skills preceded five-a-side practice matches or sometimes full games were played, depending on how many players attended training. The players may have initially perceived me to be a curious figure - a relative of their club secretary and regular centre-half, who wanted to learn more about how they regarded sport in their lives - but to achieve a greater degree of comradeship and indeed acceptance, it was necessary for me to demonstrate some proficiency on the football pitch, such evident abilities making my reasons for being amongst them a little less conspicuous. My competence on the pitch during training afforded me a certain footballing credibility from which the Rovers players/respondents determined my sporting credentials: if I could play the game, it followed that I could understand it. Being a British Punjabi-Sikh meant that they perceived me to have an understanding of their experiences, but without any actual footballing ability on the pitch and without displaying my general (tactical and trivial) knowledge of football matters (usually in the pub), I would not have been considered as someone who 'knew his football'. Such displays were necessary, for I never attempted to disguise or hide the fact that I was an academic researcher and that my interaction with the club was with respect to a doctoral research project. There was initially a degree of reticence in the players/respondents approach to both myself and the project based perhaps on a presumption that I would assume myself superior to them, but the informality and geniality of my relationship with the Rovers group dispelled any notions that may have been held concerning a superior/inferior position.

I became good friends with a number of the players and a greater bond was achieved when, in February 1997, I was invited to join them on their footballing tour of the Punjab. During their exploits in India, in the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments in Britain and in social situations, I was placed in a position where I could observe and participate in what transpired. Such a methodological stance permitted me to immerse myself in the social and cultural world of that which I was researching. to “hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants [respondents/players] did” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:79). But the prior experience of being part of the same wider community of British Punjabi-Sikhs imbued my position with greater interpretative insight.

My extended interaction with the Keaneston Rovers players reduced the possibility of distrust and unfamiliarity that may have effected the quality of their responses when interviewed about their sporting experiences. There was, however, little mutual familiarity between myself and older respondents (those associated with Keaneston Rovers and other Punjabi-Sikh respondents) who were vital in my reconstruction of the Punjabi-Sikh sporting history in Britain. Within the South Asian communities in Britain, education is perceived as being of high status, conferring respect and honour upon those who excel in or achieve higher honours in educative pursuits. As I made clear my reasons for approaching older Punjabi-Sikhs and talking to them about their roles in the establishment of Punjabi-Sikh sport in this country (and its role in their lives), my project was seen to be ‘worthy’ and commendable, attributes that led the

more venerable respondents to earnestly involve themselves in the provision of accurate and wholesome data. I had little difficulty in eliciting such data from them; in fact, almost all the respondents openly expressed their commendation for any project that sought to bring to light their own attachments to sport, which may otherwise remain largely unknown to people outside of the Punjabi-Sikh community.

This project was not a ‘pure’ ethnographic study. I borrowed certain fundamental aspects of ethnography for particular areas of the study. Since my presence as a researcher was stated clearly from the beginning, there was little or no need to deploy any system of disguise, or adopt any sort of ‘cover’ to grant me freedom of movement and acceptance in the given environment. The method of ethnography that I utilised was based around the rubrics of being in the environment of the subjects (Punjabi-Sikhs and the *Shaheedi* Games) and “to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to [record]... what is seen and heard” (my parenthesis) (Fetterman, 1998:9). My admittance to this work’s ‘borrowing’ of ethnographic principles is not by way of a disclaimer, apologetically cowing from criticism of a distinct methodological procedure, moreover, the restraints of time, finance and logistics (such as the finite duration of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments) precluded against the deployment of, and immersion in, a full-blown ethnography. Instead, if ethnography involves “participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of the participation” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:16).

then this study is undoubtedly “ethnographically informed” (p.11). Agar (1980) comments on the arrogance of the ethnographer, or rather how ethnography itself is an “arrogant enterprise” (p.41). He continues:

[I]n a short period of time, an ethnographer moves in among a group of strangers to study and describe their beliefs, document their social life, write about... and generally explore the territory right down to their recipes for the evening meal. The task is an impossible one. At best, an ethnography can only be partial (ibid.).

Interviews with the respondents were conducted in a semi-structured manner. Although the thematic content of the interviews had a skeletal structure (general open-ended questions that allowed for detailed responses, avoiding ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers), the communicative intercourse between myself and the respondent(s) was allowed to flow and follow other directions, but always with a view to returning to (or appertaining to, however indirectly) the structure, ensuring that the interview remained “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn and Cannell, 1957:149). Younger Punjabi-Sikh respondents were interviewed either individually or in small groups. The group dynamic served to create an environment conducive to ‘sports-talk’, where between three and five young men spoke candidly about their own associations with sport, the sports they play and the teams they support. Older respondents were selected more particularly, with the specific individuals who played central roles in the establishment of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain interviewed in isolation, to allow them to narrate their experiences. The more venerable affiliates of Keaneston Rovers were also interviewed so as to gain the views of those who attended and played in the

early *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. It soon became apparent that directly related questions that pointed to specific aspects of their relationship with sport, were necessary for older interviewees. According to Allport (1942) the most effective means of finding out what people do or think or have done, is simply to ask them. This was the approach used for the older subjects, who were permitted to branch out from the questions asked into other (related) areas of their experiences, such as the type of work they were involved in, their familial situations and economic standing.

An important aspect of interviewing (particularly in a research environment) is acknowledging that strict boundaries outwardly distinguishing one form of interviewing from another are sometimes blurred. Bell (1997:94) calibrates the research interview along a “continuum of formality”, with unstructured interviews at one end of the scale and structured interviews at the other. In accordance with Bell’s assertion that “[M]ost interviews carried out in the main data-collecting stage of the research will come somewhere between the completely structured and completely unstructured point on the continuum” (ibid.), I discovered that shifting the methodological emphasis between the unstructured and structured poles was an idiosyncratic necessity. The interview approach was informed by (if not wholly tailored to suit the dynamics/individual sensibilities of) the group or individuals to be interviewed. The type of data required also worked to shape the means by which it was sought, i.e. specific historical details required the asking of particular questions

around certain topics and thus a greater emphasis was placed on ordering interviews with firmer structure in an attempt to gain the necessary material. The recollections of the older respondents/interviewees were used to reconstruct the history of the *Shaheedi* Games and how the tournaments were experienced in their early years. This historical reconstruction was orally transmitted. I was able to accompany a number of the older respondents to the tournaments themselves which allowed them to speak of the changes in the way these events have evolved and the changes in the way that they are participated in within the very specific (changing) environment that they sought to (retrospectively) describe. I attempted to situate the reconstruction of the past in the dynamics of the present. My role as the researcher was palpably secondary to my perceived position as a young Punjabi-Sikh who had an interest in knowing about how the tournaments began and evolved. It is a trait of many Punjabi-Sikhs (and other South Asian groups) that elders are referred to as ‘uncle’ or ‘auntie’ regardless of whether they may be related to you or not. It was in this vain that I walked, sat and spoke at length with Punjabi-Sikh ‘uncles’, elders who relayed to me with an almost paternalistic duty the history of the *Shaheedi* Games and their experiences of them. I retained the ethnographer’s cap although it was made somewhat invisible to consolidate (what had become) the productive inter-generational relationship between myself and older respondents. I would sit with them as they enjoyed the odd glass of whiskey or rum with friends and relatives and listen to their stories of tournaments of old and what they used to do, how they played and how shifts in the tournaments’ development occurred. It was at such points that

oral history and ethnography worked most efficaciously in tandem to validate the data that was being procured.

Interviewees' familiarity with the study's agenda was varyingly a help and a hindrance. Prior knowledge concerning the subject of the research guided them in respect of the data they generated in the interviews. This same prescience at times seemingly proffered responses that were tentatively couched for their apparent 'use-value' within the research project as a whole. One interviewee arrived at the interview with prepared notes, in anticipation of the type of data he considered important and useful. Whilst this undoubtedly aided his own ability to offer relevant information within the interview setting, it also indicated just how respondents' perceived notions of appropriate data could serve as a deflective influence from eliciting original and unrehearsed material. To manoeuvre around such potential 'inauthenticities', moreover the possible "eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer" (Borg, 1981:87), interview methods that allowed for movement between unstructured and semi-structured techniques of data gathering were varyingly utilised. Thus, whilst the broad subject-focus of the research was openly known by respondents, a largely unstructured form of interviewing enabled a general (but directed) sphere of conversation to be established. With the casual introduction of pre-prepared questions and subject areas that required specific attention, I was able to garner relevant data

without totally compromising the conducive informality of the sphere of conversation.

Unstructured interviews which permit guided but freely-developing conversation can be time consuming. With the availability of respondents for interviewing subject to individual circumstance, it was essential to use the time to glean as much relevant data as possible. Arksey and Knight (1999:7) rightly point out how “unstructured interviews produce a wealth of qualitative data; [where] the findings can generate deep insights into people’s understandings of their social world”. They continue by offering a caveat warning that “the time needed to do justice to all the data collected is considerable” (ibid.). Indeed, this was a very real pitfall to avoid. Having a ready semblance of structure to hand (in the shape of prepared questions and points for discussion) provided a formal back-up when the interviews fell foul of straying too far from the topic being addressed/explored. Although the prepared questions and topics were always available, it was not always necessary to make strict recourse to them when interviews proceeded along relevant lines. Factors such as the varying ages among the respondents and the divergence in their abilities/willingness to convey veracious accounts of their sporting associations, engendered a requisite sliding along the continuum of formality where sometimes free-flowing dialogue was allowed to develop and unfold, and at other times (with different sets of group or individual interviewees) thematic prompts, open-ended questions or direct inquisition

were deployed to ensure the most efficacious use of time and elicit the most apposite data.

The artifice of the research interview can be disguised to a certain degree. Some interviews conducted with young Punjab-Sikhs took place in leisure club bars and refectories, or at the respondent's house, in a setting where the conversation would not be regarded as anything out of the ordinary or inappropriate, and also somewhere that was not deemed to be an artificially designated site for such intercourse. Brenner et al. note how:

[T]he interview is attempting to harness the daily occurring activity of talk. The research situation, however, is a rather special conversational interaction in that it has its own particular dynamics, such as interview style and setting, that have to be taken into account (1985:7).

Younger Punjabi-Sikh respondents required me to adopt a more colloquial style, using a language and manner that was similar to their own. This is not to essentialize any rigid template of how young Punjabi-Sikh males behave or communicate but there are regional variations in the external markers of these youths, differences that manifest in dress-codes as well as attitudes. The conversation flowed largely along the lines of the questions that had been pre-arranged and English was the main language spoken by both myself and the interviewees. Older interviewees who had a

lesser grasp of the English language, were spoken to in Punjabi and they responded in kind. With Punjabi as my mother-tongue language and my ability to read and write in the language meant that linguistic problems were virtually non-existent. My response to spoken Punjabi with Punjabi retorts imbued interviewees with a confidence in my ability to converse in the same dynamic ‘language’ as they did.

The fact that I am a turban-wearing Punjabi-Sikh had a dual impact: I was viewed as someone who was obviously part of the same cultural/religious heritage as themselves, my turban being a marker of Sikhism. Yet, my close-shaven appearance (which rejected the religious prohibition on cutting hair) acts as a sort of ‘disclaimer’ to my seemingly overt religious affiliation. I informed the respondents that my clean-shaven state was an accession to ‘western’ pressures of ‘fitting in’ and not wanting to stand out from the crowd by wearing a long beard. The obvious flaws in such legitimating excuses were seemingly overlooked by the subjects and the more time I spent with the Keaneston Rovers players, the less significance this issue had.

The use of in-depth interviews for gathering appropriate data was deemed to be the most profitable and proficient means by which information could be suitably compiled. However, this form of data acquisition is not without its drawbacks. Any

information collected via the interview procedure cannot be unhesitatingly ascribed with an immanent and intrinsic veracity. Marshall and Rossman note the crucial necessity of interviewees' co-operation on a personal level for the interview process to be of any value (1995:81). I attempted to eradicate, or at least dilute, any points of conflict or disjunction that may have hindered the mutual flow of information between myself and the interviewee(s): linguistic variation, explanations of my appearance, using non-threatening and conducive interview settings, adopting formal and informal, colloquial and respectful styles of intercourse when and where necessary were all influential variables duly considered and manipulated in my endeavour to ensure the elicitation of accurate responses, or responses that were as near to accurate as possible. There always exists the possibility of respondents lying about their experiences, exaggerating or making elaborate claims to particular affairs that may or may not be entirely fallacious, but an interviewer's discretion and insight into the subject matter being researched should assist him/her to sieve these instances from the factual. However, such a procedure does remain subject to human, sentient fallibility. Younger Punjabi-Sikh subjects, were questioned about immediate attitudes, opinions, beliefs and experiences, while memories of past sporting experiences may have been relatively fresh in their minds. This immediacy, or contemporality reduced the risk of disinformation on the grounds of mnemonic deficiencies or memory lapses. For older Punjabi-Sikh respondents, recalling events that may have happened over thirty years previous to their re-telling of such episodes, did seem, at least in general principle, to be somewhat more susceptible to varying degrees of memory failure, a sentiment that Raleigh Yow (1994:19) concurs with

when she states that “even when the narrator thinks she or he can recall the event vividly, the account may not be accurate”. It was the older respondents who were the foundational ‘story-tellers’. Without their oral histories of the inception of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain, it would not have been possible to begin to establish the evolution of sport in the lives of this community’s younger members. The specific advantages and disadvantages of oral history testimonies shall be given due recognition, but it is necessary to reiterate that the interviews, no matter how informal the environment, were still conducted in what is essentially a contrived milieu. Since I did not withhold my identity as primarily that of an academic researcher, I immediately set in place an artificiality to any intercourse that occurred henceforth. Brenner (1985) elaborates:

[T]he reporting of information is... necessarily and inevitably embedded in a social situation, the interview, with its own peculiar social psychological organisation. Thus we can never assume that the accounts given are simply answers to questions; they are the joint products of the questions as perceived by informants and the social situational circumstances within which the questions were put to them (p.151).

Interviews, whether held in respondents’ homes or in the popular social club frequented by Keaneston Rovers affiliates or even outdoors (in leisure parks or recreational fields), were recorded on a small tape recorder. The quality of recording equipment has great bearing on that of the recorded data itself. I also had use of a micro-cassette recorder with a sound-enhancing microphone which reduced interference and extended the range of the sound captured on tape. Even in informal

settings, such as the social club where background noise could have resulted in poor quality recordings, the close proximity of respondents (individually and also when in small groups) to the recording equipment maintained audible and intelligible data to be mechanically stored. Such essential hardware serves a greater purpose than to simply record conversations. Arksey and Knight (1998:105) propose how, “[U]sing a tape recorder demonstrates to informants that their responses are being treated seriously”. Owing to the familiar nature of my relationship with some of the respondents, I came to use the recording equipment as a marker of the ‘seriousness’ of the interviews in terms of their importance to the study as a whole and to overcome the danger of distorted communication from over-familiarity (on either or both party’s side) which can occur when a researcher spends relatively prolonged length of time with respondents. Indeed, with some younger respondents who were occasionally inclined toward ‘joking around’ when being interviewed, the tape recorder came to almost symbolise the moment when I was not merely the person who ‘tagged along’ with the group, but someone with a distinct and serious purpose, who sought their serious contribution.

There was little by way of objection to the audio recording of interviews. The equipment was unobtrusive and portable and thus easy to set-up almost anywhere. It also eradicated the need to take notes during interviews. Note-taking can be time-consuming (particularly long-hand writing) and the physical act of writing during a

conversation can be distracting (for both interviewer and interviewee), often extending the interview process into a more drawn-out operation.

Owing to the largely unstructured or semi-structured form of the interviews, data that was germane to the study had to be sifted from the interweaving clutter of conversation. A lack of time to transcribe the interview tapes in full and financial resources to afford any professional transcription of the tapes, resulted in my using the tape recorders themselves (as well as a transcribing machine when I had access to it) to play-back the recorded material and then set down on paper in written form all the appropriate and illuminating data collected. The very task of trying to capture the spoken word in written format is problematic, not solely because one is attempting to transmogrify one communicative idiom into another, but also because the personal ‘accent’ of the translator (i.e. the researcher) will exert an interpretative proclivity over the text itself. Samuel (1998:389) states how, “[T]he spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page”. Transcribing spoken interviews that contain idiosyncratic variations from one respondent to another should not fall prey to the “perils of the transcript” (ibid.). It is the task of the transcriber/researcher to avoid superimposing his or her own inflection or order onto the speech of the respondents. The art of transcription, as Samuel suggests, “is to convey in words the quality of the original speech” (ibid.). With this in mind, I attempted to include those particular idiosyncratic elements that were

peculiar to individual respondents' speech patterns in the transcription of the data offered in the interviews. Translating the interview material from older subjects, who often spoke in Punjabi, further compounded the act of transcription. Translating spoken Punjabi into corresponding English words and sentences did not cause major difficulty, but trying to "convey the cadences of speech as well as its content" (ibid.) proved a more testing task. The Punjabi language itself is often spoken in a colloquial form, particularly by Punjabis from rural/village backgrounds. Terms such as '*samjiya*' used as conversational suffixes to signal the close of speech have corresponding English equivalents - in this case the informal 'you know'. In English, serves the same semantic and communicative purpose in rounding off a passage of speech. Such idiomatic nuances were included in transcription whether in their originally spoken English or via commensurate English counterparts when expressed in Punjabi. Even this seemingly simple act of seeking English equivalents for Punjabi terms imposes some degree of personal inflection onto the data gathered and recorded. I was also required to exclude from transcription material that was not usefully pertinent to the study. Such interception from the researcher (however necessary) results in the transcription "being neither neutral nor value free. What passes from tape to paper is the result of decisions about what ought to go on to paper" (Arksey and Knight, 1999:141). Whilst acknowledging such practice, I endeavoured to relate, as accurately as possible, the spoken data into written form, in both content and style. The transcripts were partially sanitized to a measured degree, insofar as fidelity between the semantic value of the data as issued by the respondents and its transcribed form was earnestly maintained. In order to express the intended

meaning of what respondents said (particularly older respondents speaking in Punjabi) in the transcripts, a greater (English) linguistic cohesion had to be conferred upon the testimonies when written. Whilst some minor semblance of individual articulation had to be compromised in order to re-frame what was spoken in one language into the writing of another, my own fluent appreciation of Punjabi helped reduce the possibility of losing elements of the essential meanings of the responses given by subjects. For some of the younger respondents who had spoken English since childhood, there were no similar problems of translating data from one language to another. The use of occasional sexual expletives were mostly excluded from transcription when they served no function other than as conjunctions or simply as a matter of habit. As and when such language had direct bearing on the message intended to be communicated, it was included in transcription.

Hammersley (1983) evokes a notion of the validity of social research data and of the knowledge gained by the researcher that does not call for absolute certainty but rests upon procedural and critical confidence. Walsh (1998:232) further extends this premise by offering a criteria through which such confidence can be attained:

[T]he production of truth rests on three things: the *plausibility* of the claim given our existing knowledge; the *credibility* of the claim given the nature of the phenomena; and the *circumstances* of the research and the characteristics of the researcher (his italics).

The largely undocumented nature of the ‘existing knowledge’ concerning Punjab-Sikhs and sport did not necessarily impede the validation of the new data gained. Indeed, the principles of plausibility and credibility as well as the circumstantial variable do not operate in isolation from each other. Previous studies allied with my own research and my own experiences of being a Punjabi-Sikh sports enthusiast made available a critically appreciative understanding of the nature of the phenomenon being researched. The circumstances of the research were often located within the physical and thematic environs of the subject under study. Punjabi-Sikhs who variously participated in sport were often interviewed around sporting occasions, and were in full knowledge of the subject of the research and their own role in it. Disclosing the practice and principles of the study and making apparent my own agency in its conduct, allows for greater confidence in the validity of the data and in the knowledge procured without having to imbibe it with an *a priori* certainty. A limited amount of respondent validation was used to further verify that the data acquired from the respondents was an accurate representation of the views/experiences that they held. Allowing subjects themselves to view the material that they had volunteered was an effective means to establish authenticity. It also proved to be an opportunity for some respondents to amend or add to their accounts/testimonies. This was not done in the immediate aftermath of interviews. Draft notes taken from transcripts were shown to selected individual respondents who were asked as to the accuracy of the data i.e. did it correspond to what it was they wanted to say. Respondents predominantly accepted their original contributions without amendment, the chance of revision occasionally sparking new insights or

recollections that were noted and added to their original statements. However, permitting subjects to verify their own data is not an unproblematic solution to the quest of validation as they are not unequivocally best placed to judge the data they themselves have given. As Marsh (1998:231) states, “[respondents] may not be privileged observers of their own actions... [and] may have an interest in rationalising their beliefs and behaviour” (my parenthesis). A degree of self-interest cannot be overlooked when asking respondents to be their own authenticating critics. Whilst the data itself cannot be manufactured by the researcher, its plausibility does engage the researcher’s discretion and increased interview practice (essentially the dyadic act of verbal and non-verbal communication) helped to ascribe greater discernment to my own verifying faculty.

Whilst triangulation was not used as any formal mode of validating the data from respondents, it is a method that is almost a ‘natural’ undertaking for social research. Comparing the data given by different respondents was a reflexive exercise that served to corroborate the testimonies of certain interviewees. I referred to this for the purpose of analysis and to make sense of the data, as a system of comparing and contrasting in order to fully utilise findings. Comparing the testimonies of Punjabi-Sikh footballers of similar age groups helped to establish an experiential chronology of how Punjabi-Sikhs have engaged with sport from the moment of immigration to Britain to the present day. The truth-value of respondents’ statements were not

measured by their synthesis with one another. but rather worked to place singular accounts within the wider context of shared experience. moving out of the realms of the individual and into that of the 'community'. Using this method then allowed individual experiential divarications to be critically viewed alongside the prevailing 'norms' issued by the data gathered and for it to be understood in relation to this and not outside of it.

There are Punjabi newspapers that have been running almost as long as Punjabi-Sikhs have been settled in Britain, *Awaze Quam*, *The Punjab Times* and *Des Pardes*.¹⁴ *Des Pardes*, has been covering the *Shaheedi Games* tournaments (predominantly the Birmingham event) for thirty years, but access to the store of old *Des Pardes* copies had been terminated. The local Birmingham newspapers yielded invaluable recorded documentary evidence of the *Shaheedi Games* inception in 1965, such as the numbers of people who attended early events, brief accounts of the sports played and occasionally side stories that told of non-sporting episodes at the tournaments. Despite there being almost unbroken coverage of the *Shaheedi Games* tournaments since 1965, these newspaper accounts and articles were not substantial enough to present a holistic, contextualised and 'lived' description of what the tournaments meant to those who instigated, competed in and attended them. Oral history serves as a resourceful supplement to written records, yet it is difficult to state categorically

¹⁴ See Tatla, D.S. and Singh, G. (1989) *The Punjabi Press*.

which form of documentation supplements the other: Davis et al. regard oral history as “supplementing and enriching the written record” (1977:6). I am not adopting a position that necessarily and unquestioningly confers an *a priori* superior authenticity to newspaper documentation or the written record over oral testimony as every piece of documentation has agency and mediation, and as such, distortion and error cannot be ruled out, regardless of the form of the documentary evidence (p.5). The documentary symbiosis of newspaper articles and oral testimony proved to be the most reliable, indeed the sole source of data gathering with respect to Punjabi-Sikhs and sport, specifically the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments.

Humphries (1984) comments upon the importance of what ‘ordinary’ people have to say about various aspects of their lives and how oral history has the potential to recognise the value of such everyday experiences. For Humphries, recognising the value of ordinary experience must initially involve acknowledging the worth of “our own experience and the experiences of those who lived around us” (p.3). John (1989) also draws attention to the fact that “one’s own personal history can prove to be useful” (p.5). As previously stated, I had my own experiences of the tournaments and of sport as a British Punjabi-Sikh to call upon to inform my research. I could also make illuminative use of the experiences of close relatives and family friends who had a more central role in Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain. My use of oral history as documentary evidence to substantiate the versatile association of Punjabi-Sikhs and

sport was predicated along the dialectical lines of Thompson, who argues that oral history allows for a “more socially conscious and democratic history... [which] can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place” (my parenthesis) (1979:X). It was my aim to produce an objective account of the Punjabi-Sikh communities’ sporting experiences without losing the peculiarity and personality of the lives for whom such experiences represented a lived reality.

The collection of oral testimonies for both historical and contemporaneous data concerning Punjabi-Sikh experiences of sport was not and is not divorced from the ethnographic principles that also contributed to the methodological framework of this study. Ethnography, according to Fetterman (1998), “is the art and science of describing a group or culture” (p.1). It was not my intention, nor was it a requisite for the research problem that the group, British Punjabi-Sikhs, be ‘described’. It was necessary, however, that the place of sport within this group be examined and to this end placing myself in the environment within which Punjabi-Sikhs partook of sporting activities was significantly advantageous in procuring data as to the nature and effects of such participation. Hence, accompanying a British Punjabi-Sikh football club on a footballing tour of India as well as affixing myself to them during *Shaheedi* Games tournaments and training and socialising with them allowed me to ask questions as to their individual and collective experiences of sport that were

topically and physically located in the research universe itself. Even when seeking the historical underpinnings of contemporary movements in Punjabi-Sikh sporting endeavours, those who were able to provide such precursory data were largely able to do so whilst located within the real-life referential sphere that they themselves had helped shape. There appears to be distinct advantage in asking questions relating to a particular phenomenon whilst actually in the lived mechanics of the phenomenon itself. As Patton (1990:89) states, “there is a very practical side to qualitative methods that simply involves asking open-ended questions of people and observing matters of interest in real-world settings in order to solve problems”. I sought not to divorce the processes of interviewing from the milieu in which Punjabi-Sikh sport took place. During the Shaheedi Games themselves I was able to witness mass Punjabi-Sikh sporting participation, reflect on the data received from the experience of the games separately, placing me in a position to ask relevant questions to the appropriate people, within a befitting research arena.

Whilst ethnographic methods granted me insight into how British Punjabi-Sikh football teams operate both intrinsically and outwardly, the use of interviews served to take full advantage of that privilege without destabilising the research environment. Founding figures of Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain were sometimes interviewed during the tournaments. The prevailing merry-making that governed the non-sporting participation in the tournaments sometimes hindered in-depth interviewing

(respondents' homes or other suitable locations were then used), but gathering data whilst embedded in the research phenomenon proved to be both effective and productive. Hammersley and Atkinson (2000) believe that, "there is no reason for ethnographers to shy away from the use of interviews" (p.131). It is my position in this study that the principles of ethnography and those of qualitative interviewing, as well as oral history, work in cohesive tandem with greater emphasis asserted by one methodological form or another in respect of the nature of the data sought. Thus when attempting to establish young Punjabi-Sikhs' identification with football, young Punjabi-Sikhs were asked questions about this very subject in an environment where football was being played and watched. When enquiring about the initiation of the Punjabi-Sikh sporting movement in Britain (and in the Punjab), respondents were interviewed in and amongst the very milieu that they had helped establish or had been part of.¹⁵ In trying to set out the historical antecedents to the current Punjabi-Sikh sporting scene, the collection of oral testimonies by way of piecing together the history of this movement, proved to be the most efficacious and valid means, indeed, at times the only means. To complete the tableaux of the evolution of this community's association with sport, methods of ethnographic practice were utilised with regard to capturing not just the perceivable enactment of such sporting associations, but also to experience the reality of them. In-depth interviewing wove through these seemingly distinct methodological practices acting as a cohesive agent. Interviews were essential in establishing both a bygone Punjabi-Sikh sporting

¹⁵ Interviewing older Punjabi-Sikhs in tournament settings was not essential. However it did provide sensory stimuli that guided respondents' recall and conveyance of past events. As noted earlier, interviews with older respondents may have taken place in their homes but 'fidelity to the phenomenon

tradition, as well as illustrating a present incarnation of that continuum. Therefore there is a working inter-connectedness between the practices of both oral history and ethnography that is essentially (in)formed by the use of qualitative interviewing. The participant observation methods of ethnography and interviewing do not essentially demand mutual distinction, indeed, “the dividing line between participant observation and interviewing is hard to discern” (p.139). The deployment of methodological practices is decided by the nature of the subject under study and the research problem. In order to establish whether or not there was a Punjabi-Sikh participation in sport (both historic and current), I was required to use elements of ethnography and qualitative interviewing as well as a phenomenologically-informed theoretical perspective. These methods were not used in isolation, nor were they viewed as being rigid methodologies in and of themselves. Ethnography, in particular, can be both a method or an overall methodological perspective/approach, its fate being the nature of the research problem and the type of data the researcher is seeking to elicit.

The value of oral history in conveying the experiences of ethnic minority and marginalised groups has been commented on by historians (cf. *inter alia* Humphries, 1984; Raleigh Yow, 1994; Williams, 1979). It is therefore surprising that little such chronicling has been produced by the minority or marginalised groups themselves: “[W]ritten accounts by immigrants of their own experiences are rare” (Williams,

under study’ (Hammersley and Atkinson (2000:7) was striven-for in attempting to locate interviews in

1979:43). While I am part of the diasporic British Punjabi-Sikh community that is the focus of this study, my task is to re-tell the sporting experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain through this work and so my critical mediation partially negates the first-hand immediacy of members of the community concerned with narrating their own experiences. Another consideration when employing the substantiating services of oral testimony/history, is whether or not it is possible to hold the expressed experiences, opinions, attitudes of one particular person, or a select few, as wholly and accurately representative of the wider group of which they are a part. Can the experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs in Shelby or Coventry, encapsulate, exemplify or typify the experiences of other Punjabi-Sikhs in other locations around Britain? The question has no definitive answer. However, it is possible to approach such a question from a certain position and work through its theoretical opacity instead of lamely falling at its feet. The fact of the subjects of this study being imbricated in a social history of migration and of the diasporic condition, makes it possible to unite them in their common experiences. Localised variations in the particularised mechanics of their individual lives would of course occur, but the 'larger' mechanics of the immigration process and condition would imbue them with a similar perception of such an experience. Schrager (1983) puts it thus: "[A] migration story can be a very personal account and at the same time an incarnation of the peopling of an era, the exigencies of pioneering, and the aspirations of all who risk relocating to find a better life" (p.80). Therefore, the individual account may be taken to have referential applicability to a wider group and as the articulation of a shared reality (Raleigh Yow, 1994). Before the origins of this shared diasporic reality are duly outlined, it is first

necessary to clarify the religious, cultural and political heritage of the Punjabi-Sikhs and the place of sport upon such a multi-discursive landscape.

CHAPTER 4

FAITH IN ITS PLACE - SIKHISM AND THE PUNJAB

The geographical region in the north west of India known as the Punjab derives its appellation from the Persian words *punj* (also pronounced/spelled as *panj*) meaning ‘five’, and *ab* meaning water or river. The five tributaries of the River Indus that all flow through the Punjab region are the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej. It is a vast area that stretches from the Khyber Pass in the north west, down to Delhi and from the southern tip of the Himalayas to the desert land of Rajasthan (Pettigrew, 1975:3). Due to its location on the north west frontier of the Indian subcontinent, the ancient Punjab region was the gateway for a variety of explorers, invaders and conquerors to enter and dominate South Asia. The heavy-handed presence of the Afghans, Mahmud of Ghazni, Tamerlane of Samarkand and Muhammed of Ghor led to the antipathetic collision of the divergent faiths of Islam and the indigenous religion Hinduism (Patwant Singh, 1999). The Punjab was at the epicentre of a religious bifurcation where Hinduism and Islam co-existed in an acerbic concomitance, with the city of Lahore serving as the centralised seat of power for the whole region. It was the Afghan nobleman Bahol Khan, who brought some degree of stability to the disunited environment and it was during his reign (1450-

1526) that the future founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, was born on 15th April 1469 in the village of Talwandi near Lahore (ibid.).

The emergence of the Punjab as a distinct 'Sikh' state is largely a political procedure that whilst being founded on the established rubrics of a distinguishable religious movement was in fact consolidated and distended by one particular Sikh ruler, namely the Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). In 1801 Ranjit Singh crowned himself Maharaja of the Punjab at the age of twenty, a seat of governance over a united empire that was to last thirty-eight years. Whilst swelling the physical domain of his empire, Ranjit Singh had developed a stable, if somewhat uneasy, peace with the British. Following the Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, a period of political instability shook the foundations of his once great empire with a number of his sons and self-appointed heirs usurping one another in their attempts at securing Punjabi rule. In 1845, the British military governor, Major Broadfoot, embarked on a series of cynical exercises designed to provoke the Sikhs into attacking the British forces (Patwant Singh, 1999). Between 1845 and 1849, the Sikhs fought a series of bloody battles with the British. There were a total of seven battles that constituted two separate wars (the first taking place from 1845-1846 and the second 1848-1849) which came to be known as the Anglo-Sikh wars, and in which both sides incurred heavy casualties. It was during these wars that the Sikh propensity for battle, courage and martial dexterity was petrified in the minds, bodies and journals of the British

officers who experienced their combative prowess all too acutely. Despite being betrayed by their leaders (particularly Gulab Singh who defected to British sanctuary and aided their military manoeuvring), the Sikh Army officers continued to fight with great valour. As the once great empire became subsumed into the belly of the insatiable colonial beast, the conceptualisation of the Sikhs as a martial race had been confirmed and subsequently used to fuel the military extensions of the British Empire.

4.1 FATHERS OF THE FAITH

Sikhism is known to have been originated by the first and founding Guru of the faith, Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak was born in the Punjabi village of Talwandi, now Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, in 1469, son of a Hindu village revenue recorder. Even as a young child Guru Nanak renounced the superficial ‘clothing’ of faith and worship. The young Nanak chose to disassociate himself from the superfluous superstition and ceremony of ‘organised’ religion, in this case Hinduism (Harbans Singh, 1964:19). The young Nanak declared that there was no Hindu and there was no Muslim. With this ideal he set forth to travel extensively across Asia and met many people; those who chose to stay with him and found resonance in his teachings were the first Sikhs (the word ‘Sikh’ meaning disciple). Guru Nanak’s teachings were based around the fundamental tenets of the “belief in one God, nameless, formless, omnipotent and all pervasive... [discarding] the multiplicity of Hindu Gods and Goddesses... and the

pointless ritualism and ceremonies and most importantly the Hindu caste system” (Bhullar, 1991:13). Women were given equal standing by Guru Nanak and by such revolutionary principles he was seen by many (especially Hindu fundamentalists) as a unlawful blasphemer. His message was “a unique blend of mysticism, revolutionary zeal, idealism and practicability” (ibid.) eschewing reclusive doctrines that equated spiritual salvation and elevation with anchoritic abstinence from family, working and social life. Contrary to the conjecture that over the course of modern Sikh history that has widely propagated the notion that Guru Nanak’s teachings were a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism sought to reject the traditional postulates of these religions that emphasised “obedience to such outward conventions as temple or Mosque worship, pilgrimage, the reading of sacred scriptures, and other such outward observances” (MacLeod, 1989:2). Whilst clearly espousing philosophical principles that negated much of the accepted axioms of Islam and Hinduism, Guru Nanak’s teachings told of the virtues of tolerance and harmony and equality of all of humankind. To this end, an open, free kitchen where people from any caste, religion, or creed could congregate and share in food and listen to the Guru’s teachings. This communal kitchen (which became known as *langar*) was especially for those who were forced to go without food due to poverty or destitution and continues to operate in Sikh temples around the world. Guru Nanak documented his teachings in the written form of the *Adi Granth*, which was later to be added to by succeeding Sikh Gurus and become the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Nanak passed away in 1539, and as well as a growing number of followers he also left behind a

burgeoning faith that was given totemic figureheads and direction by nine spiritual successors, who collectively represented the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith.

By the time of the tenth Guru's elevation to the head of Sikhism, ritual conversion to Islam was forced onto many Sikhs (and Hindus) by the ruling Mughals. It was the sixth Guru, Guru Har Gobind who took up arms to resist such oppression following the martyrdom of his father Guru Arjun Dev, and thus:

Guru Hargobind (1606-44) chose himself a warrior's equipment for the ceremonies of succession. He sat on the *gaddi* with two swords, declaring one to be the symbol of his spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. This was a very significant gesture which vitally influenced the subsequent course of events in the Punjab (Harbans Singh, 1964:30).

Guru Hargobind then began a pressing movement toward the militarisation of his Sikh following, impressing upon them the need for tolerance, humility, compassion and justice, whilst clearly advocating the bearing of arms and developing the skills necessary for combat to serve and protect the faith that they held to be sacred and true. The robust defence of the Sikh faith was continued by each subsequent Guru who suffered torture and martyrdom at the hands of Mughal rulers. The slaying of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, led to his son Guru Gobind prematurely having to assume responsibility for the survival of Sikhism.

Guru Gobind was a self-taught scholar who was fluent in a variety of languages including Sanskrit and Persian. His poetry and philosophical writings completed the *Guru Granth Sahib*. He was himself a skilled fighter who fought alongside his devotees on the field of battle against the ruling hill rajas as well as Mughal forces. It was on 30th March 1699, the celebratory day of *Vaisakhi* (the Indian new year which now falls on April 13th) that Guru Gobind consecrated the distinct and distinguishable Sikh identity, and Sikhism's union with martiality as a means of protecting those who cannot protect or defend themselves and self defence that was just were established. From a crowd of approximately 80,000 Sikhs gathered at Anandpur in the Punjab, five Sikh disciples who had offered themselves for sacrifice to show their loyalty to the Guru, were instead baptised by the Guru as recognition of/for their faith. They were referred to henceforth as the *Panj Pyarre* (the five beloved ones). After baptising Guru Gobind as a symbol of his equity with all his followers, they drank a sweet nectar (*amrit*) which the Guru stirred with a double-edged sword as a sign of their united commonality. This was the birth of the *Khalsa*. Then Guru Gobind instructed his Sikh faithful that from that day forward, Sikhs shall be united as the *Khalsa* (the pure ones) and that they were not to shave or trim their beards or their hair, which was to be kept covered and manageable by wearing a turban. This was to give the Sikhs an imposing and distinct visible identity that would distinguish them from all other Indian groups, and not allow them to hide or deny their Sikh status in the face of grievous hostility. Guru Gobind introduced the 'five K's': the *kesh* - the keeping of unshorn hair, *kangha* - a comb to keep in the hair, *kara* - a steel bracelet representing the unbroken circularity of the Sikh brotherhood, *kachh*

- under-shorts to signify cleanliness and *kirpan* - a small dagger/sword symbolizing the Sikh commitment to the protection of justice. As a final act of uniting and unifying the *Khalsa* faithful, Guru Gobind instructed all Sikh men to accept and use the title of 'Singh' (meaning *lion*) in their names, and for the women to adopt 'Kaur' (meaning *princess*). These assigned names were to be used either as a middle appellation or in the place of a surname, which often indicated caste or clan membership. This was the birth of the Sikh lions of the Punjab, led by the tenth apostle of the faith, the saint-soldier Guru Gobind.

Before his death at the hands of a Mughal assassin in 1708, Guru Gobind decreed that the succession of Sikh Gurus would stop with him. He would be the tenth and last apostle and that the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib* should be reverently regarded as the bearer of all the Gurus' teachings. From the humble beginnings of a saintly man's vision of equality amongst all people and of a faith without ritual or superstition, Sikhism had become a highly distinctive brotherhood that continued to embrace those ideals but also incorporated into its very identity, a martial dimension that used the sword, symbolically and physically, to defend itself and others whenever despotism, corruption or injustice threatened.

4.2 A MARTIAL RACE?

It was as much out of necessity as design that the passive, non-violent Sikhs of Guru Nanak's era were transformed into the combative, martial Singhs under the direction of Guru Gobind. It was then the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who himself came to be popularly known as the 'Lion of the Punjab', who proceeded to inculcate the martial dimension of Sikhism into the minds of those within and outside of India through his expansion of the Punjab as a Sikh kingdom.¹⁶ Following defeat at British hands, the Sikhs of the Punjab became even more skilled and renowned fighters of even greater courage under British military leadership. Their systematic enrolment into British regiments reached its apogee when those Sikhs who were transformed into Singhs via British military interjection, amounted to 39.6% of the British troops at the outbreak of World War I (Leigh, 1922:44).¹⁷ The British deployed the theoretical structures that held political currency at the time, in particular nineteenth century biological determinism, to initiate and sustain their beliefs in the hereditary martial qualities of Punjabi-Sikhs:

The Sikh is a fighting man and his fine qualities are best shown in the army, which is his natural profession. Hardy, brave, and of intelligence; too slow to understand when he is beaten; obedient to discipline; attached to his officers; and careless of caste and prohibitions, he is unsurpassed as a soldier in the East... The Sikh is always the same, ever genial, good-tempered and uncomplaining; as steady under fire as he is eager for a change (Falcon, 1896:65-66).¹⁸

¹⁶ Richard Fox (1985) who uses the phrase 'martial species' in respect of Punjabi-Sikhs in his work *Lions of the Punjab – Culture in the Making*.

¹⁷ Cited in Fox, R.G. (1985) *Lions of the Punjab – Culture in the Making*.

¹⁸ Quoted in Fox, G.R. (1985) *Lions of the Punjab – Culture in the Making*.

4.3 SPORT IN THE PUNJAB

The Indian subcontinent has achieved moderate notoriety, acclaim and even success in a handful of modern sports. Hockey, cricket and squash are principal among the sports that have been expertly mastered by South Asian players and proponents. It should be noted that those sports and games that are defined as being indigenous to India are not - owing to the diversity and disparity of Indian peoples and Indian states, cities, towns and villages – indigenous to all Indian people across the whole of the country. Many such activities are localised and peculiar to particular regions and particular groups of people. De Mello offers the following description of the nature of these specialised activities:

Indigenous [Indian] games may lack the spectacle of Western sports. They are primitive in character and outlook. But they are peculiar to the country, and satisfy the villagers' or the industrial labourers' natural urge for physical activity and healthy recreation (my parenthesis) (1959:255-256).

The most popularly played and established of these sports are *kabaddi*, *khokho* and *gulli danda*, all of which have widespread appeal. *Kabaddi*, which is also known colloquially as *koddi koddi* in parts of the Punjab, has a number of variations, but its standardised version is the *amar* format. The game takes place on a grass or dirt field involving two teams of at least six players each at the beginning. One player from the attacking team (known as the 'raider') approaches the defending team (who form an arc of defending players linked together by holding hands/wrists or interlocking arms). The object of the game is for the raider to make contact with at least one of the opposing players and return to his own team's half of the field without being stopped

by either the player(s) he has touched or any others defenders. During all this time, the raider is only allowed one intake of breath. He has to make this noticeable by chanting “*kabaddi, kabaddi*” throughout his raid, loud enough for the umpire/referee to be able to clearly hear him. If the raider is tackled or held by a defender, he is deemed to have been stopped when he breaks his chant, i.e. he takes another breath. A successful raid is when a raider makes contact with one or more of the defending players and returns to his half without breaking his chant. Points are awarded for to the attacking team for any or all defenders that are contacted on raids where the raider has returned successfully. Matches are played under specific time restrictions. *Kabaddi* is a very physical game that demands suppleness as well as strength, speed long with power and strategy, technique and skill are as imperative in this sport as in any other. Sonam Singh Govind, a keen sportsman in both the Punjab and following immigration in Britain too, offered a first-hand account of village *kabaddi*:

My sons think that *kabaddi* is an easy sport. They have never played it. They play football and they play on the computer they don't know. I played at school and at college before I came here. I also played football but I loved *kabaddi* first because I played for my village. Our village had lots of honour because we had a strong *kabaddi* team. My best friends were my *kabaddi* friends and we played in the fields in the village after school and also in school. My friend Palla broke his arm twice because he was forced to play when he was not right. It is a hard game you know, also it is about honour. (Govind).

Gulli danda is an Indian game that has sporting cousins all over the world. Played between two equally sized teams using a short stick and a small piece of wood, the

object is merely for the small piece of wood to be struck with the short stick and the ‘strikers’ can be struck out *a la* baseball style, or caught or bowled similar to cricket. *Gulli danda* is a particularly popular sport amongst rural village communities, there is no specific reason as to its rustic appeal, but the fact that it is a sport that is less inclined to cause injury may have a bearing since rural workers cannot afford to be incapacitated unnecessarily. Whilst still remaining popular in certain pockets of the Indian population, many indigenous games have been superseded in popularity and prevalence by those sports that were introduced during the time of the British Raj.

If the above mentioned sports can be deemed as being ‘traditional’ Indian sports, then those games inaugurated and advanced by the British during their time of Imperial occupancy, may be regarded as ‘modern’, as Guttman points out, “[A]lthough there are exceptions to the rule, cultural change in the realms of sports is usually in one direction – from traditional to modern forms” (1994:158). The British Army were instrumental in the diffusion of these modern sporting forms across the British Empire, in particular on the Indian subcontinent, and sport itself was instrumental in the consolidation of imperial rule (c.f. Cashman, 1980; Mangan, 1985, 1988, 1992; Stoddart, 1982).

The need to man their armies with Indian soldiers who had the physical capabilities for endurance, skill and battle, impressed upon the British occupiers the agency of various sporting forms that were conducive to harnessing and emphasising martial skills. The potential for physical conditioning was allied with the possible moral, psychological and temperamental qualities that team sports especially could positively inculcate (Mason, 1990). Indeed Mason suggests that sport proffered a, “means of transmitting a set of British beliefs and standards about fairness, honesty and straightforwardness in a context of respect for traditional authority which may be summed up in the idea of ‘playing the game’ but which went far beyond it” (1990:85). Sports such as hockey, football and cricket were introduced by British regiments located across the subcontinent. Team sports were used by the British to establish closer links with the Indian population, at once imposing and sharing colonial sports with the colonised. The need to develop more efficacious (and exploitable) relations with the Indian aristocracies was a task that was again approached with a sporting agenda:

[A]s a significant, and even integral part of British imperial lifestyle in India, sport was a crucial element in the process of the assimilation of indigenous rulers into the culture of the Raj...Sport was then propagated amongst the elite families of India through the schools patronised by the nobility (Fleming, 1995:7).

Cricket enjoyed the greatest support and patronage from the British in India and its aristocratic heritage is still evident today with poorer, more remote, rural communities remaining much less enthralled by its peculiar charm. It is hockey that is

acknowledged as the national sport of India, more popularly and successfully played than cricket (Holt, 1989). The embeddedness of cricket in the loci of political and colonial power allowed it to emerge as the perceived national sport of a specific (not entirely organic) Indian national consciousness. The fact that cricket requires a bat and a ball to play the game, even on a very basic level, precluded some sections of the subcontinental population from taking up the sport, but not to the extent that logic would seemingly dictate. The other major sport introduced by the British – football – required only a ball and a patch of land (whatever and wherever this may have been). But cricket's rich, aristocratic patronage promoted its sportive proselytising cause. The popularity of football in India has been attributed to its non-reliance on specialised equipment, making it accessible to more Indian people than the financially demanding sport of cricket (De Mello [1959] remarks how football has been "almost without question, the most popular game in India" [p.183]).

The history of football in India is marked by a residual sense of under-achievement. This is not merely a reflection of the lack of sporting successes attained by club or national teams in competition, but also on the inability of the game itself to have fulfilled its initial promise as the most pervasive sporting recreation of India, indeed India's national sport. This is not however to suggest that Indians, in this instance Punjabi-Sikhs, hold no identification with the sport. Sonam Singh Govind, a near

archetype of the robust, sportive Punjabi man, put forward an intimate articulation of Punjabi physicality:

You should understand that we are physical people. we do lots of physical things, do you understand? I've worked on the land in the Punjab and I've worked in factories in this country and it is man's work you know, physical work. When we played sports in the Punjab we'd play anything that we enjoyed. They played football in our village and in the big college and we played there too. Football is hard game. you sweat and you must be strong and good at the game - that is why we liked it. Most attention was given to the hockey teams because everyone knew about hockey. Some people in the village would laugh at football and say that it was a children's game but I liked to play very much. (Govind).

Football was most emphatically spread across the subcontinent by the British regiments that were stationed at various locations. The establishment of the Indian Football Association (IFA) in 1893 was initially solely made up of football clubs representing white British teams, reflecting the fact that there were very few indigenous 'Indian' teams. This anomaly was redressed with the formation of clubs such as the Sovabazar Club (1885), the Mohun Bagan Club (1889), the Mohammedan Rovers Club (1891) and the Kumarthuli Club (1894). These teams began to compete against British military teams, and after initial failures, a major victory was scored when the Sovabazar Club beat a regimental team of white Britons in the Trades Cup (De Mello, 1959:189). But it was not until 1911 that any Indian team achieved any truly outstanding victory that held national significance.

The IFA set up their flagship Shield cup competition in 1893 which was given secondary importance by the competing British military and European teams but primary importance by the Indian clubs. In 1911, the bare-footed Mohun Bagan team defeated the much-fancied British favourites, East Yorkshire regiment, by two goals to one in the Shield Final. This was a sporting event that both British and Indians interpreted as having nationalistic, racial and political significance (Dimeo, 1999:16). The Mohun Bagan victory had repercussions beyond the field of sport and putatively influenced members of the wider population of India. It certainly effected a belief that there was nothing inherently deficient in their own make-up that set them apart as inferior to their imposed colonial masters:

in that peculiarly English sport, football, it fills every Indian with joy and pride to know that rice-eating, malaria-ridden, barefooted Bengalis have got the better of the beef-eating, Herculean, booted John Bull in that peculiar English sport (*Nayak*, 30 July 1911) (quoted in Mason 1990:93).

This Mohan Baghan victory embodies a degree of modern ambivalence. Its great glory and tragedy rests in its unchallenged position as one of the only truly momentous footballing events in India's soccer history (Bains and Johal, 1998). In 1937 the All India Football Federation (AIFF) was formed to take over all organisational affairs of indigenous Indian football, its primary concern being the Indian clubs and not the declining military and European mercantile outfits (De Mello 1959:185). The only subsequent noteworthy achievement of Indian football was a fourth place finish in the Melbourne Olympics of 1956, but by the 1960s, as Murray

(1994) states, “India had lost even its dominant place in Asian football” (p.216). Thus it was not until 1995 that a positive move to re-establish the popularity and structural authority of Indian football was made by the arrival of a team of FIFA advisors at the behest of the AIFF. Following their in-depth inquiry into the state of the Indian game (at local and national levels), they put forward the recommendations that were to usher-in the ensuing full-time, semi-professional league.¹⁹

Football in the Punjab largely follows along the lines of the game’s development in other regions of India where the British regimental presence was prominent. The assignation of racially defined martial qualities to Punjabi-Sikhs meant that the Punjab was a significant site of British military activity and recruitment. Sikh conscripted into the British army were trained in European combative techniques and “[S]port soon followed basic military exercises as part of the recruits’ training. Football was one of a number of sports to which the [Punjabi-Sikh] recruit was introduced” (my parenthesis) (Dimeo, 1999:21). Dimeo goes on to point out how “[F]ootball remained in the Punjab, even if it was less popular than other sports such as hockey, wrestling and athletics. Punjabi teams, such as JCT Mills, have had success in Indian leagues and cup” (ibid.). The most celebrated Punjabi footballer (and the most popular, gifted and successful players in the history of Indian football) has been Jarnail Singh. As a footballer during his heyday in the 1960s, he had no

¹⁹ Bains and Johal (1998) and (1999) provide an extensive account of the state of modern Indian

equal in the Indian game. The then serving FIFA president, Sir Stanley Rous, witnessed his soccer abilities and commented on how Jarnail Singh would grace almost any football team (Bains and Johal, 1998:114. Sarwan Singh. 1984:xv). Football in the Punjab has flourished more recently under the patronage of the college education system. Equality of opportunity in terms of training and coaching is still, unfortunately, subject to the prevailing conditions of privilege based on wealth. Whilst local rural schools may make attempts to incorporate the game of football into their limited sporting curriculum, it is the further education colleges that provide disciplined and co-ordinated coaching, playing/training facilities as well as regular organised competition. Sport in the Punjab owes a massive debt to the pioneering work of the former Maharaja of the Punjabi state of Patiala, the Maharaja Bhupindra Singhji, who contributed his own financial resources, as well as those of other members of India's nobility, to send a representative Indian hockey team to compete in the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. As well sowing the seeds of India's subsequent dominance of world hockey, Bhupindra Singhji also patronised the causes of Indian athletics and cricket. After his death, he was succeeded as the Maharaja of Patiala by his son Yadavindra Singh, who, along with his brother Raja Bhalindar Singh, continued to further the development of sport in India and raise its international profile (p.47). Indeed, Indian sport was most prolifically served and promoted by the game of hockey.

football and how the new league has developed. The AIFF's relationship with FIFA is discussed and an overview of the clubs and Indian players is also provided.

Under the influence of the British military in the latter part of the nineteenth century and during the early decades of the twentieth, hockey took a firm hold in the Punjab. Since India's entry into Olympic competition in 1928 (where they won the Gold Medal at their first attempt), Punjabi players such as Kehr Singh Gill, Nawab Pataudi and S.M. Usaf were integral to India's international successes. Such dominance reached its apex during the Olympic Games held in Rome in 1960 when "India was represented for the first time by an all-Sikh hockey team with the sole exception of Lal Chand" (Virdi, 1992:12). It was only after the partition of the Punjab in 1947, when many Punjabi-Muslims chose to re-locate in the newly formed nation of Pakistan, that India's reign as the world best hockey nation began to come to its end. Amongst the most successful of India's finest hockey players, Sikhs stand out as a constant majority. Udham Singh, Jaswant Singh, Pakhar Singh, Prithipal Singh, Jagjit Singh, Harbinder Singh, Balbir Singh and Gurbax Singh are legends of the sport both in their home country, and in international hockey domains. Hockey in the Punjab was zealously promoted through the education systems where schools and colleges successfully made the game an integral part of the sporting curriculum for boys and girls. A competitive infrastructure that included local village hockey and district leagues allowed players of varying abilities to take part in the sport. Manmohan Singh, who played for the Punjabi district of Jullundhar before emigrating to Britain recalled the following experience:

In the Punjab you have to be good at sports. I was good at hockey. Sometimes it is like you are only half a man if you don't like sports do you know? This match

against Phagwara was only a small match but my uncle told me that the family of this girl were watching. My father had arranged my marriage with her and I wanted to show them that I was a Punjabi man. I tried more for that game because my in-laws were watching and our district's honour was at stake. You see people think if you win hockey or *kabaddi* matches with your district team then your district is also more honourable. We lost that match but I still got married. (Singh).

Another sporting pursuit in which the Punjab has a strong tradition and history of producing skilled proponents is wrestling. In northern India, wrestling is not merely regarded as a sport, or simply as a physical activity that serves as a distraction or an aside from everyday life; in this subcontinental region, wrestling is literally a life order, as Alter (1992:5) explains. “[I]t is a sport, but it is also an elaborate way of life involving general prescriptions of physical culture, diet, health, ethics and morality”. Punjabi wrestling culture is not as anchoritic as that which forms the main focus of Alter's study. Punjabi-Sikh wrestlers (or to give them their proper title, *pahalwan*) do immerse themselves in the daily activities of training and preparation for bouts, and they too share in the value systems that Indian wrestlers pride themselves upon (bravery, an infallible rectitude and a strong sense of justice and the defence of the just); but they do not disavow or reject domesticity, family life or wider social interactions and duties.

The Punjab has produced wrestlers that have won world Championships since the late 19th century (Karim Bakhsh became wrestling's world champion in 1892 defeating England's Tom Cannon, followed in 1900 by the Punjab's Ghulam) (Sarwan Singh, 1984:vi). The northern Indian state has been home for both Sikh and Muslim wrestling world champions. More contemporary Indian wrestling Olympians have been Punjabi-Sikhs - Kartar Singh and Kuldeep Singh who competed in the Seoul Games in 1988. Wrestling is a popular spectator sport amongst ordinary Punjabi men, a sport that is wholly limited to men: female participation, even spectating, is limited if not tacitly proscribed.

In the field of athletics, Punjabi-Sikhs are once again amongst the most prominent achievers in the history of Indian competition in this diverse sport. During the 1950s and 1960s, all of India's athletics national records were set, broken and re-set by Sikh athletes from the Punjab, indeed, virtually all of India's medals at the cross-continental Asian Games have been won by Punjabi-Sikh athletes (p.xii). Milkha Singh particular stands out above all other Indian athletes. His greatest achievement was a fourth place finish in the 1960 Rome Olympics, a relatively modest accomplishment, but one that remains his country's highest ranking in an Olympic athletics event. Singh also won the gold medal in the 400 metres event at the 1958 Commonwealth Gamers in Cardiff, and during the height of his sporting success, "he was awarded the Helms Trophy for being the best quarter-miler in the world" (Virdi,

1992:16). Other outstanding Punjabi athletes include international triple-jumper Gurbachan Singh, Sohan Singh, Jagraj Singh, Bahadur Singh and Makhan Singh. Of these athletes, whilst they all enjoyed Indian subcontinental supremacy, with the exception of Makhan Singh, they did not make any greatly significant mark on the international stage (ibid.). Although the Punjab has the most notable history and reputation as producing India's most decorated, indomitable and gifted sportsman, only a handful of Punjabis-Sikhs have ever represented their country in the sport for which it is most famed, cricket. Perhaps the most famous of Sikh cricketers has been Bishan Singh Bedi, a world-class left arm spin bowler and erstwhile captain of the Indian team during the mid 1970s. Whilst Indian cricketers who have hailed from the Punjab have to varying degrees played at international Test level (Kapil Dev, the greatest Indian all-rounder being most noteworthy) few Sikhs have achieved any great success in the higher echelons of the game. The turbaned Harbhajan Singh has recently shown himself to be a world-class spin bowler and is a near hero of Indian cricket.

Officially recognised and governed sport is not the only means by which Punjabi people have been able to exercise their sporting desires. The Punjab is a fertile land that has spawned an agrarian culture which is one of the salient defining features not only of the geography of the region, but also of the people that inhabit it. To this day, the majority of Punjabi village farms use oxen to plough the fields. This agrarian

capacity is present in the specialised rural sporting events that take place annually in the Punjab. The *Rairpur Khela* (the Rairpur Games) have been held every year for the past twenty years in the district of Rairpur. Sometimes referred to as the 'Rural Olympics', the *Rairpur Khela* are made up of a series of sporting events that have their roots in traditional agricultural methods. There is, for instance, a race whereby the contestants sit on their ploughs and harrows whilst being pulled by their oxen in races over various distances on previously furrowed land. Oxen are involved in other events including oxen racing with their owners (or usually a young male representative) as makeshift jockeys. *Kabaddi*, wrestling, sprint races, throwing events weight-bearing events all form part of the mass-attended sporting spectacle. Whilst order, controlled jurisdiction and competitive credence are upheld to reasonable degrees, the *Rairpur Khela* are important as unique social, sporting occasions where rural communities from different parts of the Punjab can congregate annual to enjoy the physicality and technicality of their occupation, in a sportive environment. Whilst it is only men who compete in the *Rairpur Khela*, both men and women, boys and girls all enjoy the occasion of the Games together.

The role of institutions such as schools, colleges and even Sikh *Gurdwaras* cannot be ignored in the salience of sport amongst Punjabi-Sikhs, indeed. "Sikh [educational] institutions in the Punjab have played a leading role in producing players of extraordinary class and calibre" (Virdi, 1992:46) In fact, the Khalsa College Amritsar

has been responsible for rearing some of the great Punjabi (if not Indian) sports stars, including Bishan Singh Bedi (cricket). Ajitpal Singh (hockey) and Ajit Kaur (hockey). The Sikh *Gurdwaras* have encouraged the uptake of sport amongst its younger faithful, adhering to the call for strength and dexterity of body that Guru Gobind Singh advocated when re-inventing the Sikhs into a distinct people with a renowned capacity to defend themselves against any attack. Unfortunately, one of the most traditional and spectacular displays of skill, and martial prowess, the Sikh martial art of *Gatka*, as performed by Guru Gobind and his contemporaries, has dwindled in popularity in the Punjab. Previously, national *Gatka* competitions were held in the Punjab, but a lack of interest from participants has engendered the demise of such competitive events. In an interesting development, *Gatka* has enjoyed resurgence in Britain despite no longer engaging the minds or bodies of the indigenous people of the land in which it originated.

The Punjabi-Sikh sporting legacy is as redoubtable as it is prolific. It was with such a heritage in sport and competitive games that many thousands of Punjabi-Sikh emigrants arrived in Britain.

CHAPTER 5

NEW BEGINNINGS – AN OVERVIEW OF SOUTH ASIAN MIGRATION TO BRITAIN

Mass immigration of commonwealth subjects began from the West Indies in the 1950s, slightly earlier than the bloc movement from South Asia. The social and economic circumstances that engendered this systematic migration are clear:

[A]fter the last war, Britain's economy began to boom and its traditional sources of unskilled labour – the countryside and Ireland – were almost exhausted. As a result, large numbers of South Asian and West Indian workers were recruited... [to carry out] those jobs which indigenous white workers [were] unwilling to do (Fryer, 1984:25).

During the early years of this migratory period, it was mostly men from South Asia (predominantly from the Punjab, followed by those from the Gujarat and then Pakistanis) who came to Britain. The work available to them was almost solely of a manual nature, in large, often dirty and polluted factories and foundries and with lower rates of pay than white workers:

My father told me of jobs in the factory where my uncle was working. My father did not speak English. He could say 'any job, any shift' but nothing more. I

got a job making car rods and also screws and bolts. I worked on our farm in my village but that was cleaner, better work. Here we were always inside, always dirty, it was hard. Night shifts you know, they are hard, but it was work, we had to work. It didn't matter how much money, we just had to work. (Sonam Singh Govind).

Whilst migration began in a somewhat erratic and unorganised fashion, governmental control schemes and legislation began to impose stricter order and the re-settlement process. Once immigrant South Asians established a foothold in Britain in terms of guaranteed work (although it was at a differential rate of pay subordinate to that of white workers) and stable (usually rented) accommodation and arrangements were made to bring other family members, relatives and friends over from the subcontinent to join the pioneering immigrant communities. This was popularly known as chain migration and it was only possible due to the resilience, versatility and sheer hard work of the initial settlers (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1962). Subsequent South Asian arrivals from the Indian subcontinent were almost entirely the families, relatives and friends of those already established. Migration was primarily considered and engaged in solely as an entrepreneurial activity whereby working in Britain represented a chance for South Asians to generate a degree of wealth that was unattainable on the subcontinent, especially for the majority of the immigrants who were from poorer rural villages:

In the village my mother used to bring us fresh goat's milk everyday. The *dhooth-wala* knew that sometimes he hadn't to come to our house because we didn't have enough milk. Then I am in England and I am taking milk to people's houses in the mornings, in bottles, not in steel tins. I was the *dhooth-wala*. I started my milk round with nothing. I worked everyday, all holidays.

everyday and I got other Punjabis with me to work when more deliveries and routes were mine. From this I worked for my family first, then for God, and God gave me my own dairy. (Jagtar Singh Nahar).

This type of religious diligence applied to entrepreneurial endeavour helped business-minded South Asians prosper in various areas of small business practice. The 'rags-to-riches' meta-narrative is no whimsical sugar coating applied to such accounts. The transition from a mother feeding her children with goat's milk in the Punjab, to one of those children becoming a major supplier of milk to households throughout the West Midlands is testament to dedicated hard work and endurance (as well as a degree of luck) and not fairy-tale. This of course was an exception to the norm. Not all South Asian businesses were successful and not all immigrants were able to progress in white-dominated society.

With increased numbers of immigrants resident in many regions of the United Kingdom, a growing hostility to immigrant communities and immigration also vociferously emerged. This was manifest on local levels with white Britons physically and verbally abusing South Asian (and black) immigrants, excluding them from certain social clubs/pubs/bars, not renting private accommodation to non-whites, overlooking them for particular types of work and generally adhering to the belief that all 'coloured' people were inferior to white Britons, they were second class citizens that did not deserve equality or even courtesy (Holmes, 1991). The

distribution and settlement patterns of the various South Asian communities saw particular groups establish themselves in particular regions of the country. With greater Pakistani (predominantly Mirpuri) concentrations in the Yorkshire region, and a stronger Bengali Muslim presence in neighbouring Lancashire. The West Midlands became home to many Punjabi-Sikhs with a smaller Hindu population. London and its surrounding areas provided homes for an assortment of South Asian communities resident in various locations with varying concentration, Gujaratis being particularly numerous in this region (Ballard 1994, Clarke et al. 1990). The patterns, priorities and features of settlement in Britain were by no means equivocal and uniform amongst all the different South Asian communities. Thus it is necessary to concentrate specifically on the experiences of the Punjabi-Sikh pioneer immigrants.

The majority of Sikh migrants who entered directly into waged-employment in British foundries and factories were of the *Jat caste*.²⁰ On arrival in Britain, the diasporic Punjabi-Sikh communities necessarily reconstituted many of the practices and principles of the culture they had left behind in their departed homeland. Caste distinctions were just as operative and influential in Britain as they were in the Punjab (despite Sikhism's refutation of such synthetic human division). Kin-groups organised around the rubrics of the caste system and village/town membership formed the basis of specific South Asian "ethnic colonies" (Ballard and Ballard,

1977:34). Not only did religious distinctions become manifest in the formation of specific ethnic groupings, but intra-ethnic differentiation was also very much evident. Hence Punjabi-Sikhs who were *Jats* formed the largest of such kin-groups amongst immigrant from the Punjab, but it was not unusual for other Punjabi-Sikhs from other castes (mostly *Rangarhias*, who were also known as *takhan*) to associate and intermingle with the dominant group. Caste membership was seemingly a convenient and simplistic means which offered the immigrant some tangible and recognisable assurance that they were amongst people they could trust and relate to in a wholly unfamiliar environment. Caste ties, and the role of caste amongst South Asians was indeed consolidated by the process of migration. Although it may have been an obsolete social order, it was an order that was part of the tradition of the subcontinent, and thus, an organising method that was familiar when almost all else was markedly strange. As Ballard (1994) indicates, the diversification of the Punjabi-Sikh diasporic experience in Britain, is not predicated along the lines of re-settlement, or on supposed divergent patterns and experiences of re-settlement, “differentiation and disjunction” amongst the Punjabi-Sikhs is governed much more intimately by the existing caste and religious sectarian divisions (p.88). Punjabi-Sikh tournament veteran Sarwan Singh Charan drew on his own localised perspective:

Look at Valleyside. It's mostly *jat*-Sikhs. That is because when we came here we stayed here. Our *jat* men are mostly the same you see, mostly simple thinking and hard working. The *Gurdwara* here is one of the best because it is made by us. The *Ramghariya* *Gurdwara* is for the *tharkhan*, they have their own area here but mostly they think they are bigger, you know

²⁰ See Helweg, A (1979) *Sikhs in England – The Development of a Migrant Community* for studies of Sikh settlement in Britain.

better because they are more educated. But Valleyside is the home of *jats* in Coventry. (Charan).

The transection of locale and ethnicity is a point of identification that has early roots in the settlement of particular caste and kin-groups in particular areas. As we shall see in Chapter 7 this dual identification is carried forward in the establishment of mono-ethnic Punjabi-Sikh football clubs as well as in the support (or non support) for local professional football teams.

The male bias of the migration process also lent to what indigenous white Britons viewed as a type of unnatural social configuration. This view was challenged once wives, parents, sons, daughters and other relatives entered the country and made a substantial impact on the social organisation of Sikh immigrant groups. Family life became the focal rubrics of the immigrant Punjabi-Sikh social order. Charan continued:

My father did not want my mother to come here. He thought she should stay in the village. But then my brother came here and then me and my mother was only left with my sister and my sister-in-law. What life did they have there by themselves? It was funny, my mother would not come over at first. She said she would not have anything to cook. All our lives were better when the family was together, here, living here. I got married here when my fiancée came over with her sister. Our life here is nothing without family. My sons now can buy their own homes and have families and live a good life. (Charan).

The establishment of familial units in Punjabi-Sikh households were dependent on factors such as the availability of financial resources as well as legislative controls on immigration into Britain. Once set in place however, Punjabi-Sikhs began to organise themselves into a visible, productive and aspiring diasporic group who were here to work primarily, but also to play.

CHAPTER 6

SPORT IN SPIRITUALITY – THE ORIGINS OF THE SIKH GAMES

Many Punjabi-Sikh immigrant men had consciously attempted to keep themselves fit and healthy through a variety of means. The physically demanding nature of foundry work helped in this regard but running and weight-training were also used to maintain healthy bodies. While the majority of Punjabi-Sikhs did not use leisure time as actively as some of the more sports-minded of their peers, there was an undeniable momentum in this diasporic group's desire for physical and sporting activity. By the early 1960s informal volleyball matches were being arranged between groups of Punjabi-Sikh men, in local parks at weekends. However, such sporting activity did not fully gratify the demands of those who played sport or those who simply wanted to watch. It was at this crucial juncture that the opportunity to push forth and satiate Punjabi-Sikhs' lust for sport was recognised.

Shelby is a small industrial town that has witnessed a radical change in its post-war demography. The preponderance of factories in and around the town engendered the settlement of large numbers of Punjabi-Sikhs who made home closest to where they

worked. In 1957, the local Sikh community used the services of a local school hall to hold prayer meetings every Sunday. This was the origins of the *Guru Nanak Gurdwara* Shelby. By 1960, the executive committee members of the Sikh temple had collected sufficient donations to purchase an unused old church in Shelby High Street which was then converted (again using monies collected from the local Sikh community) into a *Gurdwara*. The *Gurdwara* served and continues to serve not only as a place for religious congregation and prayer, but also “the centre of communal activities, social as well as political... [It] provides an association which serves to express the solidarity of the community in relation to non-Sikhs and as a centre for internal social activities” (Desai, 1963:94). It was out of these very same principles that *Guru Nanak Gurdwara* Shelby inaugurated the very first Sikh Games in 1965.

Understanding the burgeoning desire amongst Punjabi-Sikh men in Birmingham and witnessing first-hand their ingenuity and dedication in organising their own sports ‘games’ in the grounds of Memorial Park in Shelby, the executive committee members of the temple used funds collected regularly from the ever-growing Sikh congregation to hire the use of a local sports stadium (Lynwood Sports Stadium in Shelby) for a three-day Sikh sports festival. *Kabaddi* and athletics events such as sprints and middle-distance running, as well as tug-of-war and volleyball were the sporting events that made up the first ever Sikh Games. One Punjabi-Sikh sports

enthusiast who later became one of the official organisers remembered the first Sikh sports event thus:

It was very special for us. Even if you were just watching we wore shirts and ties you know. People looked smart. I had not seen so many Indian people together like that here. In the Punjab there were lots of times, but so many Punjabi people together like that, at the same time, you did not really see that. I think that was the most different thing for me, that was the most special thing, Indians in a big group. No English people anywhere, just Indians. (Manmohan Singh).

Participants gathered from various towns in the Midlands region of England where Punjabi-Sikhs had settled, including Leicester, Derby, Wolverhampton and Coventry. Spectators were mostly made up of Punjabi-Sikhs from Birmingham, but South Asians of differing persuasions also attended. Local newspaper reports of the Games playfully observed how, “coloured turbans encircled the pitch and more than three hundred Sikhs from all over the Midlands urged their favourite teams to victory” (Birmingham Evening Mail and Despatch. [Late Edition] 1965:11). *Kabaddi* was played in the main by players from the Punjab who sought to express their prowess in British-based competition. The athletics events were dominated by younger Punjabi-Sikhs who had arrived in England as young children and who had attended English schools and were hence familiar with the running and throwing events that the Sikh Games held. Many of the older Punjabi-Sikhs also took part in such events; indeed the President of the GNG Shelby executive committee, Mr. Pakhar Singh, took part in the shot-put competition. It is not surprising that many of the committee members

were themselves active sportsmen back in the Punjab and it was this love of sport that spurred them to continue the Punjabi-Sikh sporting traditions in Britain.²¹

Due to the number of people gathered at the Games, a police presence was mandatory and viewed by organisers and spectators alike as no more than a necessary show of the need to maintain lawfulness in an otherwise relatively autonomous arena. The very first Sikh Games were the result of the hard work, dedication and foresight of the Punjabi-Sikh people of Shelby, in particular, the committee members of the Sikh temple in Shelby. From such localised origins, the Sikh Games began to spread to a number of other English cities in which a prominent Punjabi-Sikh population was present. Whilst it was in Shelby that the Punjabi-Sikh sporting agenda was formalised and organisation was brought to what had previously been ad hoc sports participation amongst Punjabi-Sikhs, it was the city of Coventry that assumed the role of the catalyst in increasing the sporting momentum of this British ethnic minority group. The Coventry Indian Sports Committee was established by Sarwan Singh Charan. Charan arrived in England in 1950, and by 1954, along with his fellow Coventrian Indian sports pioneer Lok Singh Naranjan, had set up an informal volleyball club:

many of us had played lots of sports in the Punjab and wanted to carry on playing sports here. Because no-one else organised any games for us, we had to do it ourselves. Lots of us enjoyed volleyball and especially

²¹ See also Birmingham Evening Mail and Despatch (1965) 'A Fresh Success for Bawa'.

kabaddi, but we needed more organisation so we organised ourselves. (Charan).

Charan and Naranjan were fine athletes and skilled volleyball and *kabaddi* players. However, it was their ability to mobilise disparate pockets of Punjabi-Sikh sporting enthusiasts and unite them in a guided direction that set them apart from their pioneering immigrant peers:

we had other Punjabi men who played volleyball and we started our own club. But we also enjoyed *kabaddi* and more of the local Punjabis wanted to take part. Lok Singh and I started the Coventry Indian Sports Committee and we had close links with the Indian Workers Association who helped us with organisation and spreading the message that our people, Indians, could enjoy sport and play sport here with their own people. (Charan)

By 1966, the Coventry Indian Sports Committee had allied with *Guru Nanak Gurdwara* Shelby to consolidate the pressing and impressive development of the Punjabi-Sikh sporting programme. The success of the inaugural Sikh Games had shown that there was aptitude, demand and appetite amongst the immigrant Punjabi-Sikhs for sporting participation and consumption. The new alliance between the GNG Shelby and the Coventry Indian Sports Committee brought about the re-naming of the Sikh Games in honour of *Shaheed* Udham Singh. ‘*Shaheed*’ is a Punjabi term meaning ‘martyr’ and Udham Singh was a Punjabi Sikh martyr who was hanged to death following the assassination of the former Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O’Dwyer, at London’s Caxton Halls in 1940. Udham Singh held O’Dwyer personally responsible for the massacre of five hundred men, women and children at Jallianwala

Bagh in the Sikh holy city of Amritsar. Udham Singh and his fellow Sikh ‘freedom-fighters’, men who gave their lives to the cause of Indian independence from British imperial rule, namely Bhagat Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha, were honoured by Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in Britain by the conferment of the title *Shaheed* Udham Singh Games to the hitherto ‘Sikh Games’ (altered to reflect/accommodate the sacrifice of the other Sikh martyrs) to later become known as the *Shaheedi* Games.

One year on from the Sikh Games being held at Lynwood Stadium in Shelby, the newly named *Shaheedi* Games were held again, not just in the Birmingham town, but also in Coventry under the guidance and organisation of the Coventry Indian Sports Committee with help from the local branch of the Indian Workers’ Association:

We had permission from the council to use a local park and the police were very helpful also. We knew even before this tournament that we were going to have the Games every year, we were very sure that they were going to stay for a long time (Charan).

Whilst the Coventry Indian Sports Committee continued to develop its own sporting programmes in and around Coventry, the Punjabi-Sikh sports scene in Birmingham was dominated by the GNG Shelby. Sonam Singh Govind, a combative volleyball and *kabaddi* player who took part in early Games and actively worked for the promotion of Punjabi sport in the 1960s, witnessed the popularisation and expansion of the Games to further outreaches of British Punjabi-Sikh communities:

first there were *kabaddi* and volleyball teams just from the Midlands, but soon so and so's brother from Birmingham would tell so and so's brother in Gravesend about the tournaments, then everywhere they started setting up their own Punjabi sports federations, or the *Gurdwaras* would set up their own sports committee and organise their own tournaments. We played in lots of towns, we played to win, and we were fit and good sportsmen, but we played as brothers with everyone (Sonam Singh Govind).

As the *Shaheedi* Games grew to reach almost every enclave of Punjabi-Sikh residency, they were popularly referred to as simply 'tournaments'. It became tradition that the first tournament of the summer would take place in the south, either in Southall, Barking or Gravesend, and the Birmingham tournament (held every year over the last weekend in July) would signal the climax of the tournament 'season'. Not every venue was, however, capable of accommodating a wide variety of sports. Tournaments in Derby and Barking, for example, were limited to *kabaddi*, volleyball and weightlifting events, whilst in Birmingham a varied athletics programme could be put forward, owing to the presence of a running track and athletics field at Lynwood Stadium in Shelby. The popularity, both in terms of participation and spectating expanded to such levels that local councils became more intrinsically involved in the staging of the events. With up to 10,000²² people attending the Games, public safety (both within and outside the designated grounds) became a pressing issue, as did the subject of lawful control of the attendant masses.

²² The tournaments held in Birmingham were the only events that attracted such numbers of spectators. Whilst Gravesend and Coventry tournaments were very well attended, the central location of the

By the time of the inception of the *Shaheedi* Games, football was already proving a popular leisure and sporting pursuit for a number of Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in parts of Britain. The West Midlands was again at the forefront of the developing Punjabi footballing movement, with all-Punjabi football teams already established by 1966. Football was not an unfamiliar sport to the diasporic Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain. Indeed, it was a game that had been played in select schools and colleges in the Punjab for almost a century, and some Punjabi-Sikh men had arrived in Britain with a practical and historical knowledge of the game. The heightened footballing ambience that was created and fuelled by England at first hosting, then winning the 1966 World Cup was not lost on an immigrant sub-group that was still finding its collective feet on foreign soil:

after work we would go to a friend's house and watch the World Cup matches. Only a few of our people could afford televisions, so whoever had one knew that it was his duty to let others share as well. This way we all got to watch Eusebio and Pele and Charlton. I played football in the Punjab in my village and I was a very good player. I liked Eusebio. We liked to watch football, we never did that in India, and all the English people were very happy when England won. (Govind).

The committee members of Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* Shelby subsequently admitted football into the sporting bosom of the Birmingham tournament in the summer of 1968:

We told the *Gurdwara* that lots of our people played football. Some of the committee were old men and

Birmingham *Shaheedi* Games, and the large Punjabi-Sikh population in and around Birmingham, meant that this was the most popularly attended Games venue.

wanted traditional sports, because they wanted it just for Punjabi people. But we told them that we would get lots of Punjabi people playing football in the tournaments and lots more would want to come and watch. (Sonam Singh Govind).

Three years after the first *Shaheedi* Games in Britain, the Birmingham tournament held the first all-South Asian, all-Punjabi-Sikh soccer competition, on the football pitches at Memorial Park in Shelby. It was the combined efforts of the Birmingham and Coventry Punjabi-Sikh sports organisers that led to football becoming a fixture in the tournament programme. Both the independent sports federations (such as the Coventry Indian Sports Committee) and local Sikh temple committees were duly appreciative of football's emerging status as not only a physical hobby, but also as a developing passion, especially amongst younger Punjabi-Sikhs. *Gurdwaras* were even sponsoring all-Punjabi-Sikh football teams by buying kits and balls with teams adopting the name of the *Gurdwara* to which they were most local and to which they became affiliated. In Birmingham, for example, one of the oldest Punjabi-Sikh football teams (indeed one of the oldest established Punjabi teams in the country) is GNG Shelby . This was a team consisting of local soccer enthusiasts united under the nominal banner of the Sikh temple who were able to play in competitions against other Punjabi teams when matches against white teams was still a quite hazardous, if not entirely closed venture. A football team's affiliation to the *Gurdwara* did not necessarily indicate that all the players were devout Sikhs, or even practising Sikhs. Whilst a healthy respect for the religion, and observance of its edicts was tacitly taken for granted, many of the players were fairly relaxed about the religiously-rooted origin of their football club. Mohan Singh (known as 'Tony') was one of the first

players to play for GNG Shelby when Punjabi-Sikh football was still establishing its own identity:

I'm not an *amritari* (baptised Sikh). I used to go to the *Gurdwara* on Sundays and take my mum, but I was not religious like. Only a few of the other players were religious. But most of us just wanted to play football and the temple gave us money for a kit. Don't get me wrong, I believe in my religion, I am a Sikh and proud of it, and proud to play for the *Gurdwara*, but I eat meat, cut my hair and drink alcohol so I can't say I am a proper *amritari*. (Tony).

For Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* Shelby, a strong and healthy sporting identity was very much in keeping with the physical dextrous image of the Sikh that the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind, had propounded three hundred years earlier. Hence, many other Sikh temples around the country followed suit and established their own football teams who competed in tournaments under the patronage of whichever *Gurdwara* they belonged to. Since many *Gurdwaras* named themselves in homage to the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, a number of Punjabi-Sikh football teams simply had the prefix 'GNG' (Guru Nanak *Gurdwara*) before the name of the town in which they and the temple were located as their name, for example GNG Gravesend, GNG Walsall and GNG Barking. Such religious establishmentarian patronage is not unique to the Sikh faith. Guttman (1988) points to the invention of the game of basketball in the American state of Massachusetts in 1891. Basketball's inventor, James Naismith was asked to manufacture a sporting pastime for the young men of the School for Christian Workers. The game was taken forward by the Young Men's Christian Association in America and embodied/propagated a "muscular Christianity" (p.70).

Also in the United States of America, as asseverated by Coakley. "religious organisations took it upon themselves to provide the leadership and the physical settings for mass participation" (1990:357). This was precisely the function that Sikh *Gurdwaras* performed for the sportive desires of the Punjabi-Sikh immigrant communities in this country in the early 1960s. In Britain, as Percy and Taylor (1997) note, "some of the biggest football clubs in the country have Roman Catholic or Protestant roots: Liverpool, Everton, Celtic and Rangers to name but a few" (p.37).²³ Whilst the theologically informed metaphysical debates about sport and religion are digressive at this juncture, it is important to recognise that Sikh sporting tradition in Britain is religiously rooted in the faith itself by firstly the tenth Guru's (Guru Gobind's) transmogrification of the peace-loving Sikh disciple into the physically imposing and martial Sikh soldier-saint and also by the origination and promotion of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments by the Sikh temples themselves: Sikh sport initiated, administered, and furthered by the edifice of the Sikh faith.

The formation and existence of Punjabi-Sikh football teams was not, however, solely dependent on their affiliation to Sikh religious institutions. Whilst the role of the

²³ The religiosity of sport is not the principle concern here,. While the religious connotations of sporting fandom and support shall be discussed, the more abstract theorising of the sport/religion dialectic is somewhat of an unnecessary deviation from the primary, quasi-exegetic task of uncovering the role of the Sikh religious establishment in promoting Punjabi sports participation in Britain. Aitken (1993) argues that, "sport responds to deeply felt religious needs in human beings because it is itself a ritual that re-enacts eternal qualities" (p.211). Prebish (1993) discards any such analogous model of sport and religion: "it is not just a parallel that is emerging, but a complete identity. Sport is religion" (p.62). See also Hoffman, S.J. (ed.) (1992) *Sport and Religion*.

Gurdwaras in providing the logistical and pseudo-spiritual impetus for Punjabi teams/clubs to realise themselves cannot be understated, their example was taken forward by informal, non-religious bodies, often no more than a band of friends who set-up teams and clubs of their own. Keaneston Rovers FC, for example, was founded in 1971, and had no association with any Sikh temple. Its origins lay in the collective desire amongst a small group of friends to play football on their own terms without the patronage of the local *Gurdwara* (which already had its own nominal football team). One year prior to Keaneston Rovers Football Club's formation, another club, Wemford FC, from the same Valleyside area of Coventry had formed its own team which was exclusive in its recruitment of players, both in terms of ability and region. Wemford players mostly hailed from the north side of Valleyside and so those Punjabi-Sikhs from more central areas were disallowed from joining the Wemford team. It was in 1971 that Gurdev Singh (more commonly known as Dave), gathered similarly soccer-minded friends from Valleyside to establish Keaneston Rovers FC:

we didn't want to play for Wemford or for the *Gurdwara* - they had their own team and they were not very good. So, me, Balbir (goalkeeper) and a few others who aren't around any more, thought we'd start our own team and we played amongst ourselves. I had played football at college in India, but when I came here I had to work so I didn't get any chance to play anymore. Rovers was always about friends. You see Wemford players never even liked each other never mind people from outside. (Dave)

Similarly, Punjabi football teams/clubs began to form in other parts of England where Sikh immigrant communities lived. In stark contrast to those teams representing (at least nominally) local Sikh temples, others were formed around and took the name of local social clubs or public houses that were owned by Punjabi-Sikhs. Tall Trees FC in Shelby lent their names from the Tall Trees pub in the area, the landlord of which was a Punjabi-Sikh who sponsored the team. With many friends, even family members playing in the same team, being part of the same club and drinking in the same pub/club worked out beneficially for all concerned; landlords were assured of a regular and dedicated clientele (with extra business following victory, and even greater alcoholic consumption after defeat) and players were guaranteed of a venue in which to spend leisure time and enjoy the company of friends/team-mates in an establishment that they represented on the football pitch. It is no coincidental parallel that many English Sunday league teams are also affiliated to pubs and social clubs, the so-called English 'pub teams' were replicated by similarly minded members of the Punjabi-Sikh community too. Williams (1994b) iterates a similar statement when he notes how many clubs, "originate mainly out of local neighbourhood, kinship, work or ethnic ties" and how "many local clubs are also formed out of male networks based around local pubs" (p.155). The insurgent expansion of the Punjabi-Sikh football scene witnessed the formation of its very own governing body. The increase in the number of Punjabi-Sikh teams brought with it a need to regulate the terms and conditions of eligibility for tournament competition, the introduction of consistent rules by which all the teams could compete and a recognisable disciplinary body to whom players, managers and coaches were answerable in any event of foul play. To

this end, in 1973. the *Khalsa* Football Federation was inaugurated as the unifying association that administered, governed and regulated the ever-expanding Punjabi-Sikh football teams in Britain. The Federation borrowed its name from the events of the Sikh holy day of *Vasaikhi* in 1699, when Guru Gobind baptised five Sikh disciples in an act that formed the *Khalsa* brotherhood of the Sikh faith. Whilst its title may have directly corresponded to a religious mooring, the *Khalsa* Football Federation itself had minimal diametrical ties with any religious organisations. Whereas the tournaments were subject to the authority of the *Gurdwaras*, the *Khalsa* Football Federation was an independent body made up of representatives from a select number of Punjabi-Sikh football teams. Similar to the English Football Association, where members might also be chairman or chief executive of a club, under the umbrella authority of the FA, the *Khalsa* Football Federation consisted of members that were managers, coaches and players of the very teams that the Federation was designed to unify and regulate. The Federation worked alongside the temples in arranging the annual tournaments, but it was solely the Federation to whom all the Punjabi-Sikh football teams competing were answerable.

Players and affiliates from various clubs were nominated and then elected to fill a number of different roles within the Federation. The requisite positions of chairman, vice-chairman, general secretary, treasurer and executive member were taken up by those elected to do so. In addition to these, there were regional referees, secretaries,

tournament marshals and youth section co-ordinators, all of whom belonged to distinct Punjabi-Sikh teams/clubs of their own. The erstwhile manager, and one of the playing founders of Keaneston Rovers Football Club, Dave, was one of the early Federation executive committee members:

All the Punjabi teams needed the Federation. Without it there was too much bad discipline. If teams didn't field enough players sometimes then a game would still have to go on, if someone made a bad foul and was sent-off, that was the only punishment. There had to be some committee or something who could discipline players and who could charge fines and make sure they were paid. Instead of registering for tournaments with the *Gurdwara*, everyone had to register with the Federation. Basically the *Khalsa* Federation made the rules and made sure everyone followed the rules and if they didn't they were banned or fined. It was very important that the Federation started. (Dave)

Each team had to register itself and its squad of players with the Federation, including any youth and senior/veteran teams. Managers, coaches and affiliates were also registered so that anyone who attended the tournaments in an official capacity, as a representative of one of the Punjabi-Sikh teams, was accountable for his/her actions in whatever form. Each team was also required to pay the Federation an annual subscription. Players and affiliates of the individual teams would contribute a small equal donation toward this subscription, which was used to cover administrative costs of the running of the Federation. Fines were issued to clubs and players for the violation of codes of practise, both in terms of the football they played on the pitch and their commitment to fairness and sportsmanship off it. Any monies received from such fines (mostly consisting of money paid for red and yellow cards, fielding

ineligible players, not registering players or teams on time or un-sportsman-like behaviour) were collected and used to arrange specialist coaching for young Punjabi-Sikh footballers from the various teams. Money from this fund was also used to arrange competitive matches between Punjabi-Sikh and non-Punjabi-Sikh teams independently of the tournaments, to buy training equipment or financially help any teams that did not have the level of patronage or sponsorship that others enjoyed. In essence, the intended principle was for monies collected to be ploughed back into Punjabi-Sikh football, for its own sake.

With the plethora of Punjabi-Sikh football teams that began to establish themselves throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it was necessary to categorise the levels of competition. It became almost ubiquitous for every Punjabi-Sikh football club to have at least two, but more usually up to four teams: the under-12's, the under-16's, the first team and the over-35 veterans. It was the task, at first of the organising Sikh temples, and then the *Khalsa* Football Federation, to organise the draw for the matches to be played in the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. Teams were allocated to divisions on the basis of their previous record in tournament competition. Promotion and relegation from these divisions was based directly on performance in the tournaments. Trophies were awarded for the tournament winners and runners-up in each division across all the representative sections. Whilst the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments were the equivalent of the English FA Cup for Punjabi-Sikh football teams, a three-month tournament season was not sufficient in satiating the hunger for

playing football for many Punjabi-Sikh men in Britain. Therefore, Punjabi-Sikh football teams registered with Local County Football Associations and competed in non-league, Sunday league competitions. For those male members of the diasporic Punjabi-Sikh community who wanted to play football in an organised and competitive environment, there was little opportunity to seamlessly merge into the insular fabric of local-league amateur football. With the indigenous white community's hostility and resentment toward any foreign immigrants (Holmes, 1991), penetrating into the ranks of local all-white football teams was near impossible and often perilous. With the growing confidence in the solid establishment of a new life order in this country, those who chose to act on the rising confidences became imbricated into the main body of amateur British football. Keaneston Rovers's joint-founder Dave continued his account of the club's emergence:

we saw English teams playing every Sunday in the parks and we also wanted to play. There was a lot of racism in the beginning, racist people at work, in the pubs, in the streets, everywhere. But when we registered with the county FA we could play in the Sunday league. and after some troubles, the English teams realised we could play and although we had more problems, we were at least playing. and showing the English that we could play their game. (Dave)

Whilst Keaneston Rovers was not alone in experiencing racism, the sheer number of other Punjabi-Sikh teams breaking through into amateur leagues, particularly around the Midlands, meant that there was a steady influx of these teams (and a smaller minority of South Asian teams from other communities) that infiltrated the hitherto

closed ranks of amateur British football.²⁴ For those Punjabi-Sikhs born into a distinctly British passion for football (in its playing and supporting guises), the sport was to assume just as great a significance as it was for their white peers. The dynamics of the nominal second and third generation Punjabi-Sikhs' (the British Asian Punjabi-Sikhs') association and interaction with the game of football will be discussed later. It is necessary at this point to return to the account of the development and expansion of the *Shaheedi* Games, in particular, how the Indian sport of *kabaddi* progressed to embody socio-cultural significance for the pioneering generation of Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in Britain.

6.1 PLAYING FOR KEEPS – THE EVOLUTION OF THE *SHAHEEDI* GAMES

As the tournaments evolved and flourished, closer and lengthier negotiations with council officials and local police forces were required to ensure they were held legally and safely, in properly supervised environments. Local *Gurdwaras* appointed their own executive and sports committee members (as well as selected helpers/aides from the local congregation known as *sevadars*) to serve as official stewards. The police presence acted as a visual reminder of the fact that although the tournaments enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy, they were still subject to the prevailing laws of the greater land. The constabulary most often allowed the appointed stewards to

²⁴ The experiences of racism in non-league football by Punjabi-Sikh teams shall be brought to light in concurrence with an account of other forms of prejudice and discrimination that denied South Asians access to the professional ranks of the national game.

carry out their duties as long as law and order were duly maintained. The *Gurdwara*-appointed stewards did not bear the same imposing, conventional figure of English authority as the uniformed, regimented, white-skinned policemen. Occasional troubles would occur, mainly due to the copious consumption of alcohol, but tournaments were largely peaceful events.²⁵

Punjabi-Sikhs' long and illustrious history of being skilled hockey players has been mentioned; such a demonstrable propensity for hockey was not lost even after relocation to Britain. Indeed, with a governed arena in which players could exhibit their skills competitively, a number of Punjabi-Sikh hockey teams were formed in the mid-to-late sixties which took part in the expanding *Shaheedi* Games:

We were the best hockey players in India. When the tournaments were running we organised hockey competitions as well. We had playing fields and we had lots of good players so the tournaments just kept growing. I remember going on a tour to the Isle of Man in 1969 with our hockey team from Coventry. I wrote to their hockey federation people and they invited us to play some matches against some of their teams. We only lost one match and won three (Charan).

²⁵ There was one notorious incident at the Birmingham tournament of 1979 in which a man was stabbed in the chest during a brawl at the Games. This was reported in the local press and was a point of some concern for *Shaheedi* Games organisers across Britain. See Sandwell Evening Mail (1979) *Man Stabbed at Games*.

With more and more Punjabi-Sikh hockey teams being established, the various tournament organisers had to decide whether or not they were able to accommodate the sport into the tournament schedule. Moreover, it was a case of finding the space in which to hold a number of different hockey matches, some simultaneously. Only the larger tournaments, where the event lasted three days, were able to cope with the logistical demands of organising a hockey tournament.

The tournaments were now multi-event, multi-sport competitive festivals. With *kabaddi*, football, volleyball, athletics and tug-of-war being almost ubiquitous at all tournaments across England, the teams who competed and the players who composed the teams were drawn together along strictly geographically nominal lines. In Birmingham, basketball was added to the Games' in 1978 due to its popularity amongst younger Punjabi-Sikhs. The playing grounds at the Universities of Aston and Birmingham, as well as their indoor gymnasium facilities were hired to hold the newly included sports, as Lynwood Stadium became increasingly incapable of accommodating both the number of sports played, and the multitudes of people attending. During the formative years, any player of any sport competing in the games would compete under the nominal banner of the city from which he hailed.

Although the *Shaheedi* Games served the illusion of seemingly taking place outside of the main body of white British hegemony, white Britain still held considerable power in the Games' existence and survival. Due to the size of the crowds attending the tournaments exceeding the size and catering facilities of the grounds, particularly in the case of the Games in Shelby, problems concerning litter caused a considerable degree of consternation amongst the local, white, community. In 1976, the local councillor for Shelby compiled a report on the behaviour of the people who came to watch the *Shaheedi* Games following complaints from nearby residents. They were alarmed by the amount of litter that was left after the tournaments and local residents complained about people sitting on their garden walls and in front of their doors eating food off disposable plates and causing unnecessary litter. Such was the vehemence of these complaints, and such was the austerity with which they were received, that the local council (Sandwell) issued an initial veto against the tournaments taking place in the Lynwood Stadium complex. This veto was only lifted after prolonged and impassioned pleas from the *Gurdwara* committee who formed the 'Save the Sikh Games' campaign. The organisers gave the council assurances as to the management and supervision of the spectators, their (anti)-social behaviour and the collection of all litter.²⁶

²⁶ See Sandwell Evening Mail (1976) *Litter Watch at Sikh Games* and Sandwell Evening Mail (1977) *Sikhs Pledge to Curb Games Crowd*.

The success of the Birmingham tournament at Lynwood Stadium in Shelby was also the principle reason for its withdrawal from that venue. By the early 1980s more than 10,000 visitors from all across Britain were at the *Shaheedi* Games gathering over the course of the weekend, crowds which represented unsafe numbers for the maximum capacity of the stadium. The gathering was exaggerated in its throng by the compactness of its location. Local residents' concerns of the safety of private property, the problems of litter and the nuisance of noise and over-crowded residential areas, was eventually heeded by Sandwell Council and the Birmingham tournament held its final *Shaheedi* Games in Lynwood Stadium in 1986. The new site allocated to the GNG Shelby was the nearby King Charles V Playing Fields, a location which had already come to be the home of the *Shaheedi* Games football competition. Whilst sports such as volleyball, basketball, hockey and football were often played at venues with suitably accommodating facilities for those sports, the heart of the Birmingham tournament (indeed, for any *Shaheedi* Games event) was always present wherever the *kabaddi* competition was held. As eclectically diverse as the tournaments became, the hub and focal point of the Games remained in this sport that was most inherently, most obviously and most palpably Punjabi.

For Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in Britain, the *Shaheedi* Games assumed a wider significance and importance that eclipsed the basic function of providing a sporting arena in which this diasporic community could play and watch sport in a mono-ethnic

environment. The tournaments were a means by which the nascent Punjabi-Sikh immigrant community could re-enact an aspect of the cultural life they had forsaken in the Punjab, on British shores. Watching, playing and organising *kabaddi* matches in Britain served to recreate 'authentic' Punjabi sport. McPherson et al. point out how "sport may be exported to other societies. The sport may retain its original meaning and form; more likely it will take on a different meaning and form that is more consistent with the new culture" (1989:20-21). In this case, the sport is *translated* rather than *exported* to a new society - the people were the same, however, it was their conditions of existence that altered, from Punjabi indigenes to Punjabi-Sikh immigrants. As their living condition changed from that of being the vociferous majority in the Punjab to the unheard minority in England, the outward symbols of their cultural conformation also changed. Traditional Punjabi sport (specifically *kabaddi*) was one cultural pursuit/motif that expanded its symbolic sphere. *Kabaddi*, for Punjabi-Sikhs now resident in Britain, became one totem around/through which this immigrant group displayed their "symbolic ethnicity" (Gans, 1996:146). No longer was this sport simply a recreational activity that provided entertainment, exercise and leisurely respite from toil, it continued to remain all those things but it also came to represent something quite starkly and quite strictly Punjabi, moreover something distinctly non-English and non-white:

we wanted our own sports like *kabaddi* especially. Exercise was important but we also wanted to have our own control away from the English people. The tournaments were our Olympics. We never said no-one else could take part in them, I had many white friends come and watch every year, but the tournaments were when we made the Punjab here in England. Once a year

Punjab would come to England when we had the tournaments. (Charan)

This desire to re-create indigenous 'authentic' Punjabi culture, indeed to re-create the Punjab itself, was effected via the staging, participation in and consumption of the *Shaheedi Games*. Holt (1989) described a similar use of sport by the British military during the Raj in India. There is no small degree of perverse irony in the fact that sports (team sports such as football, hockey and cricket) were used to remind the British soldiers of 'home', of something familiarly British. As previously noted, the relative autonomy afforded to the tournaments as well as the visible and proclaimed self-governance of the tournaments by members of the Punjabi-Sikh community itself, created the illusion of a de-ethnicised enclave. The tournaments purported to represent an ulterior space outside of English/white jurisdiction, cultural form and social/political/economic hegemony. As such, the tournaments could be regarded as de-Anglicised sites of western hegemony resistance, however delusory or naïve such a principle might have seemed in its practise. The tournaments could only be granted existence by the local council authority, a governing body that was part of the bedrock of British, white-British society. The police force also oversaw the peaceful, trouble-free, legal duration of the tournaments, a law enforcement body that was again, a pillar of white Britain. Punjabi-Sikhs were able to define their own ethnicity, their own ethnic identity via the agency, the very staging of the *Shaheedi Games* tournaments. This identity lay not only in the particularly 'Punjabi' games/sports that they played and watched, and not only in the fact of their ethno-cultural majority rule at the events, but also in opposition to the prevailing social, cultural and political

norm of Britain, a norm embraced and embodied by 'whiteness'. For Punjabi-Sikhs to be able to play *kabaddi* in Britain signified the use of their own particular and peculiar cultural form, which differentiated them from the majority of white Britons. The staging of *kabaddi* matches, of an ethno-specific sporting event, was a means of defining and asserting a distinct Punjabi-Sikh ethnic identity. Punjabi-Sikh immigrants used *kabaddi* and the *Shaheedi* Games themselves to differentiate themselves from the dominant/domineering majority of the white British population, an opposition to the dominant culture of the imperious 'host' nation. The specific sports of their departed homeland represented corporeal iconic markers of that land and its difference in the face of England and Englishness:

we came to this country with nothing. We worked like dogs for low wages. Sometimes white people would call us bad things, they even attacked us. The government treated us badly, we were like second class citizens. We just tried to work hard and make good lives for our families and help our children get good education and good jobs. But a lot of the English people didn't like us being here in their country. This was their country not our country. The tournaments came and it felt like we were in the Punjab. Englishman never played *kabaddi*, it was our game, the tournaments were ours and our Sikh people showed that we have our own sport, our own culture. (Tejinder Singh Sewa)

It has been the near ubiquitous condition of immigrant groups re-locating in Britain to be posited (by the dominant white indigenously British majority) as 'outsiders'. The instance of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments distinguished themselves as an announcement, indeed, a celebration of 'otherness'. Punjabi-Sikhs themselves accentuated and revelled in their difference, in the very fact of their assigned and

asserted ethnicity. On arriving in Britain, Punjabi-Sikh immigrants found themselves 'ethnicised' as an immigrant minority community, a sub-group that was a coloured appendage to the near blanket whiteness of the British population. Instead of internalising the tacit instruction toward subordination and (in)visible quietude that such 'ethnicisation' implied, Punjabi-Sikhs made recourse to their own history and re-created the very modes of their difference, what made them 'ethnic' or different or 'outsiders', in the form of the tournaments. The ethnicity that was articulated by Punjabi-Sikhs acceded to Eriksen's version of the term whereby:

ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups... It can thus also be defined as a social identity (based on a contrast *vis-à-vis* others) characterised by metaphoric or fictive kinship (1997:39).

For Punjabi-Sikhs, the kinship that Eriksen refers to as 'metaphoric' or even 'fictive', was a real aspect of their cultural and social existence. Even synthetic kinship can be unquestioningly adopted as a 'natural' form of communal unity, particularly in conditions of strangeness and otherness in a palpably foreign land. Familial ties further extended to kin-group ties, followed by village ties (origins in specific locations in the Punjab), caste group ties then stretched out to belonging to the same religion and reached to the outer limits of the commonality of the immigrant condition. Thus 'kinship' was a very real, and important aspect in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs.

Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain could not choose to be a minority. it was numerical fact. but the ethnic ‘status’ ascribed to them was not simply absorbed as a fact of minoritisation. The Punjabi-Sikh community pronounced their ethnicity by celebrating the culturally particular/peculiar forms (such as *kabaddi*) that defined their very difference. In this instance, Punjabi-Sikh immigrants lend support to Wallman’s claim that, “in Britain, ethnicity signifies allegiance to the country of origin and implies a degree of choice and a possibility for change” (1994:229). Before discussions of such possible changes, it is necessary to provide a more holistic account of the actual experiential reality of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments.

6.2 THE DEATH OF THE AMATEUR – THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE *SHAHEEDI* GAMES

The fundamental and founding ethos of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments was that of providing the space and occasion for Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in Britain to enjoy sport, particularly *kabaddi*. Those who organised the tournaments (mostly Sikh temples) did so without seeking monetary profit or glorifying notoriety: those who attended the tournaments as spectators (consisting of mostly Punjabi-Sikhs) were not charged any fee; and those who took part in the events did not expect or receive any financial reward for their sporting, competitive participation and exhibition. In addition to costs of hiring venues such as playing fields, leisure centres and sports stadia was provision of free food (*langar*) to spectators, in keeping with one of the

benevolent tenets of the Sikh faith. The tournaments were, and continue to be, funded by donations made to *Gurdwaras* by local congregations. The Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* Shelby executive committee takes money donated by local Punjabi-Sikh people to form a special annual fund for the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. Donations are made by people who attend the temple daily and food-stuffs are offered to contribute toward the *langar*. A number of Punjabi-Sikh small businesses donate larger sums of money on a regular or occasional basis, some more than others, and some more often than others. It is from these 'income' that the temple is able to put on a sports event of the magnitude of the *Shaheedi* Games. Additional funding for special events, such as the tournaments, is supplemented by the local council, who use money from 'community chests' to offer financial help to ethnic minority groups for special occasions/events. The substantial part of the funding of the tournaments remains however, the burden/privilege of the Sikh temple itself.

As an increasing number of Punjabi-Sikhs came to watch the tournaments, especially the *kabaddi* matches, more *kabaddi* teams were established to represent the various cities in Britain that held Punjabi-Sikh communities. At first, players were simply taken from local Punjabi-Sikh communities, but as the tournaments grew in size, stature and popularity, *kabaddi* teams became increasingly competitive, with the onus much more on the winning of the tournaments than merely in their participation. *Kabaddi* clubs were established in each city/town that had representative teams at the

Shaheedi Games, to organise and control teams of players prior to tournament competition. The Birmingham *Kabaddi* Club was established in 1968 at a time when success in *kabaddi* tournaments had acquired national prestige amongst Britain's Punjabi-Sikh communities. Jagtar Singh Nahar, President of the Birmingham *Kabaddi* Club (and also President of the United Kingdom *Kabaddi* Federation) explained the importance of establishing such clubs:

Birmingham has a lot of Punjabi people here. I am proud of being Indian and being a Punjabi. I am proud of being a Sikh, but I am also proud of living in Birmingham. For us, the *kabaddi* team showed other people in other towns how great Birmingham was. The Birmingham *kabaddi* team could show how much we have done and we wanted the team to be great. (Nahar)

Nahar began work as a milkman in the mid 1960s. He established his own small dairy business and hired other Punjabi-Sikh immigrants to deliver milk. His business expanded to the point where Nahar now owns and operates his own large dairy and milk distribution business. Nahar has been an established figure of the Birmingham, indeed the national, Punjabi-Sikh community for over three decades. His millionaire status is a considerable factor in the esteem with which he is regarded, but he is also noted for his fairness in business and his charity and religious observance. He continued:

The *Gurdwara* did not have enough money or time, and some players did not like *Gurdwara* politics. The Birmingham *Kabaddi* Club was already started by some businessmen a few years before I was part of it. My dairy business became very busy and very big and I had too much work to help the *kabaddi* people then. But in

about 1975 I got more involved and I could help with a lot of expenses because my business had become very big. Everybody wanted we decided to make the Birmingham *kabaddi* team the best in the country, so we paid to get the best players. (Nahar)

Similarly, around the country, other successful Punjabi-Sikh business men patronised their city's or town's *kabaddi* teams, establishing clubs and providing the financial backbone to their operations. Originally it was merely the expenses of playing that were met. The Sikh temples who formerly provided for such financial necessities as accommodation, food and transport, gave way to the individual *kabaddi* clubs run by wealthy businessmen. With the extra finance afforded by generous (and, perhaps some glory-seeking) patrons, *kabaddi* players could receive monetary bonuses for success in tournaments and not merely the reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs. Many Punjabi-Sikh businessmen were in competition with one another in commercial fields and whilst such competition was largely kept on a superficially 'friendly' basis, success in the *kabaddi* tournaments represented an opportunity to 'get one over' on business rivals. Thus, increasing prestige, glory and money began to be heaped onto these tournaments and onto the players themselves. Krishan Singh, a *kabaddi* player of some size, strength and skill, elaborated on players' exploitation of wealthy Punjabi-Sikh businessmen's rivalry and the quest for their city's glorification:

I played *kabaddi* in India first, then I went to Canada and I used to play there. They play a lot of *kabaddi* in Canada, Punjabi people there are more traditional than in England. Here football is more liked by the young ones, but in Canada *kabaddi* is still number one. One of the managers of the Birmingham *kabaddi* team asked me to play in England in the tournaments for Birmingham. He said that they would pay for my

aeroplane ticket and give me somewhere to stay and train and money for food and going out. So I came and joined the Birmingham *kabaddi* team and we won a few tournaments. (Krishan Singh)

Singh was by no means an isolated example of *kabaddi* players being drafted in from abroad to bolster the *kabaddi* teams in England. Most frequently, players would be brought over from the Punjab for the duration of the tournament season (from the end of May through to the end of August). Airfares were paid, accommodation was provided, living expenses met and appearance fees paid to players for representing the teams of particular *kabaddi* clubs from various cities. It was not long before players in Britain also began to command appearance fees and win bonuses. By the mid-seventies tournament, *kabaddi* had become, for all intents and purposes, a professional sport, where the majority of clubs were run by wealthy Punjabi-Sikh businessmen. Others were controlled by independent organisations such as the Coventry Indian Sports Federation, but even this established and heralded institution acceded some governing authority to the men of commerce who could entice the best players with promises of attractive financial packages.²⁷ The Birmingham *Kabaddi* Club however, made no pretensions about their agenda:

We knew how much money was needed for the tournaments, and how much players had to be paid, and we had a secretary, a treasurer. I was the President, and I still am. Although we were all friends, we were very

²⁷ This accretion of a money-oriented drive for success can be seen to mirror the changes in other professional sports such as football in this country. The case of Jack Walker, a wealthy Lancashire businessman who bought Blackburn Rovers football club in the early 1990s and ploughed millions of pounds into transforming the football club into the English Premiership Champions by 1994. His wealth attracted a big name manager in Kenny Dalglish who could then offer lucrative contracts and pay large transfer fees for top quality players.

serious about the club and made sure everyone knew what had to be done and did it. (Nahar)

Whilst the essential *raison d'être* of the tournaments remained - to allow Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain to play and watch sport in a non-intimidatory, 'familiar' environment - a shift had occurred from the original ethos whereby no other 'gain' was procured from participating in sporting events other than that of the joy of the sport itself. This can be equated as a move from the amateur to the professional, for as Sewart (1985) points out, "the amateur participates in sport because he/she wants to while the professional participates for pay" (p.77). It was not uncommon for a player to play for Birmingham (or any other team) in one tournament season and then represent another team or city the following year. Sewart views the onset of professionalism as detrimental to the quintessence of sport itself: "[T]he denigration and corruption of sport comes when it is engaged in for utilitarian ends. Sport thus forfeits its virtuosity when it is taken up for reasons other than sport" (p.81). For the players, *kabaddi* only offered part-time employment. They could only earn money from the sport whilst the tournaments were in season or if there were specially organised tours or exhibition matches. For the rest of the time, players (particularly those living in England) most often had other means of employment such as manual labour and driving work, or self-employment such as small businesses. Only the exceptionally gifted and truly great exponents of *kabaddi* were afforded real personal fame. One such player was Balwinder Singh Fidu. Fidu played and lived in India as a professional *kabaddi* player. Acclaimed on the sub-continent as one of the sport's greats, he was often courted by many English-based clubs keen to secure his on-field services. The name

of the great 'Fidu' alone was enough to send expectations of a club's chances of success way beyond actual ability. Fidu was also the biggest draw in the game of *kabaddi*:

Fidu was the most famous player in India and he was the best. Fidu could help any team to win a tournament by himself. Derby were the first team to get him when he came from India. A lot of teams in Canada wanted him also so he could choose. He came to Birmingham in 1983, we offered him good money and we gave him a Mercedes car to drive while he was here. We lost in the final of the tournament, but we had the honour of having Fidu play for Birmingham. (Nahar)

The partial professionalism of tournament *kabaddi* did not necessarily preclude a player's participation in the sport for other reasons than those of monetary reward. Sewart, in a somewhat blanket statement, claims that, 'the amateurs strive to keep sport properly defined as an enjoyable rather than a fruitful endeavour' (ibid.). The receipt of monies for participating in a sport does not necessarily proscribe any endemic enjoyment that one may derive from it. Certainly, many *kabaddi* players played the game and enjoyed the game first and foremost in and of itself. The fact that they received payment was a bonus, Krishan Singh outlined this point:

As a boy I loved playing *kabaddi* and watching it. I played for my district and then I played in Canada and in England. Even when different teams paid me to play in tournaments and other matches, I still loved playing. It was nice to have money as well, but I would have played anyway. Why shouldn't I play for the team that gives most money? If these rich businessmen want to pay me to play for their team, then I am not stupid, I am not going to play for £100 when I can play for £200. They are the professionals, not the players. (Singh)

Singh's argument may seem somewhat self-serving in as much that it can be accused of a central contradiction. However, he has a valid point in that the wealthy businessmen who run and own the various *kabaddi* clubs/teams are the maintainers of a professionalistic ethos.

An interesting observation surrounding the on-set of a form of professionalism in the *Shaheedi* Games is that such a development was not based in and born of any attempt to exploit the growing market/audience that craved the Games and watched the *kabaddi* matches *en masse*. Professionalism in the tournaments was not a market-led phenomenon, but the result of localised, almost personalised sporting glory, indeed the ownership and acquisition of sporting glory without requiring or boasting the talents to achieve it, a glory that basked in the glow of owning the champions and bestowing victory on the city/town under whose name the champions competed and won. Thus, neither the wealthy Punjabi-Sikh businessmen nor the Sikh temples were looking to exploit the crowds that attended the tournaments by charging any fee for the privilege of watching Punjabi-Sikh sport. The competition between and amongst Punjabi-Sikh businessmen stirred not just in commerce, it extended to the sporting domain and since many were incapable of competing on the field of play, they competed from the touch-lines, showing their strength and skill by acquiring the best players by out-paying their rivals.

It must be noted that whilst the players may not have initiated a professional ethos to tournament *kabaddi*, many of them have not been averse to taking advantage of the benefits that the rivalries between Punjabi-Sikh businessmen and the areas in which they live engendered. Players are not bound by any long-term contracts, there are however, formal agreements between the clubs and the players as to which team they will play for in any given season and for how much money. A player cannot play for a different club during any one tournament season once he has agreed to play for one particular club. Much like being ‘cup-tied’ in football, in *kabaddi*, even if the player does not make an appearance for one club, he has to remain loyal to that team for the whole season. The notion of loyalty, although diminished in the ‘pay-and-play’ world of modern tournament *kabaddi*, has persisted as a weighty consideration for many players:

I know some *kabaddi* players who get paid more money than me in other teams, even in the Birmingham team I know two players who get more money than me, but I love the people of this club. Not just because of the *kabaddi*. I came here firstly only to play *kabaddi*, but I saw other things available, and *Jugga bhaji*, (Nahar) gave me a job in the dairy and then helped me to get my family in a home here. Now I have my own shop. I would never play for another club, Birmingham is now my home and these people are now my family as well. They supported me and I will always support them.
(Krishan Singh)

Whilst such club/region loyalty is often predicated along similarly personal lines, player fidelity can also be subject to the highest bidders. Krishan Singh’s allegiance to the Birmingham *kabaddi* team is also a show of respect and appreciation for the assistance that he has received from particular members of the club. Since he is able

to make a living outside of the game of *kabaddi*, he does not need to solicit the highest wages from other clubs to make the most of the tournament season. There are a number of other *kabaddi* players, the elite in the sport, who are not required to procure other means of employment or occupation, and can instead rely solely on *kabaddi* for their income. Such players are not based in or play in the U.K. alone. These top players are ‘bought’ or rather ‘hired’ by clubs during particular tournament seasons in various countries. *Kabaddi* is a professional sport in India (although players receive nothing like the monetary reward that foreign teams may offer). International exhibition matches are often arranged between sides from India, Canada, Britain and even Pakistan.²⁸

The late 19th century ideal of the amateur sportsman as being the “elevated symbol of all that was good in sport” (Cashmore 1990b:133) seemingly became as foreign to Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain as it began to do at the turn of the last century in ‘indigenous’ British sports. The underlying assumption that the professionalisation of sport leads directly to its corruption is not wholly sustainable in the case of *kabaddi* and the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. Indeed, the presence of free food is more an indication of the lack of a money-making operating ethos, almost flying in the face of commercial pressures. According to Cashmore, “[I]f contests can draw crowds they

²⁸ Pakistan has a strong tradition in the sport of *kabaddi*, a fact that owes much to location. *Kabaddi* has always been a popular pursuit in the Punjab and pre-partition (before 1947) the game was played by Punjab-Sikhs and Punjabi-Muslims alike. The establishment of new national boundaries, cutting

qualify as spectator sports. This doesn't make them implicitly corrupt" (ibid.). However, the sheer fact that there are large crowds at the tournaments, represents ample opportunities for selling/advertising/promoting one's business concerns. Cashmore cites the professionalisation of Rugby (in its League incarnation) and soccer during the mid-1880s as an instance of spectators/crowds influencing the performative abilities of the teams they watched: "rugby and soccer had become so popular... that spectators, particularly those in the industrial cities, would pay to watch *en masse* thus making money available to induce good players to appear regularly" (p.135). For tournament *kabaddi*, the best players were 'induced' to play for teams by the money of the wealthy Punjabi-Sikh entrepreneurs that patronised the clubs and not directly from the pockets of those who came to watch the sporting event(s).

There are, almost undeniably, commercial reasons for Punjabi-Sikh businessmen patronising *kabaddi* clubs. Players representing certain towns/cities wear the business or company name of their sponsors and patrons on the fronts and backs of their kit. To have your business associated with a successful team is just as much prized in the world of tournament *kabaddi*, as it is in the world of professional football. The most striking parallels however, are most evident when compared with sport in the United States of America:

through northern Punjab, schismatically divided the *kabaddi* players of Sikh heritage from those of

[U]nlike British ball clubs, which are run by an elected committee, the chairman of which has executive, but not autocratic, power, baseball and football clubs in the United States are invariably under the control of an individual. The owner's influence is extensive: to have control of a ball club is to be able to be able to make decisions on every facet of the operations. So owners have played a pivotal part in commercialising sport (p.139).

The commercial 'ownership' of *kabaddi* teams by Punjabi-Sikh entrepreneurs could possibly be viewed as the most acceptable form of the professionalisation of the tournaments. With players capable of earning a healthy living from the sport of *kabaddi*, pay-as-you-play contracts offered by wealthy businessmen are a much-preferred option compared to the prospect of paying admission fees to attend and watch the *Shaheedi* Games. As one veteran attendee of the Games put it:

the tournaments can never be so much about money, people will never pay to go to the tournaments, because tournaments are for the people to come and watch sports, and meet friends and family people and enjoy themselves without worrying about cost. There is free *langar* and people come from everywhere. Tournaments are not to make money, they are to make people happy. (Tejinder Singh Sewa)

For the entrepreneurial patrons of British-based Punjabi-Sikh *kabaddi* clubs, profit is measured in glorious reverence as well as opportunistic maximisation of advertising potential. This is in stark lamented contrast to the decidedly and deliberate non-profit making spirit of those who pioneered the Punjabi-Sikh sporting movement in this

country. Sarwan Singh Charan, whilst ceding ground to the near eligiac logic of the financial demands of international *kabaddi*, recalled the founding principles that refused pecuniary interests any motivating influence:

my friend Kaushal Singh Manindra helped me set up the Indian Central Sports Federation UK in 1970. We had help from the *Gurdwaras* and from some of the council people and some local businessmen gave us money as well. But they did not look to make their name from the *kabaddi* teams or anything like that. I have paid from my own pocket many times to take *kabaddi* all around the world and bring players here. I don't give them big cars or say they can live in this house or that house. The game I love is my profit. I have made many friends all over the world and that is my treasure. (Charan)

Charan's efforts in establishing a formal governing body was not merely designed to make *kabaddi* in Britain subject to bureaucratic and democratic control, but to install awareness of the sports existence amongst Punjabi-Sikhs themselves in Britain and promote *kabaddi* overseas. One of the great early achievements of the Federation was in forming the first ever U.K. *kabaddi* team, a group of players based in Britain. The formation of such a team, a nationally representative outfit in a sport that was unknown and unrecognised in the country that it represented, would have been of little value other than in its collection of the very best players in the country. However, Charan realised the potential for genuine international competition that such a team afforded. It was with just such a charge in mind that the U.K. *kabaddi* team left for India in February 1972. *Kabaddi* players who were born and raised in India, in the Punjab, were returning to the land of their birth to play one of their

departed country's national sports, but they were playing under the nominal banner of the United Kingdom. The opposition that they played was the full, senior representative Indian *kabaddi* team:

our U.K. team were beaten by India, but winning or losing did not matter really, but the players wanted to win. The Indian *Kabaddi* Federation really enjoyed it and they sent the Indian team to England to play us in 1974 and 1977. We played them at Coventry and in Gravesend and so many people came to see the matches, only two teams, but many, many people came to see them. You see they wanted to see the best players from India, they were still big names and in those days, they were not coming to England to play, no-one was paying much money like now. (Charan)

Soon after, in 1978, the first tour to Canada was again organised by Charan and the Indian Central Sports Federation U.K., with matches being played in Vancouver, Victoria, Winnipeg, Toronto and Admontion. Charan recognised the popularity and public devouring of such international events/tours. The transnational flow of players between India, Canada and Britain further supported the burgeoning internationalisation of the sport of *kabaddi*. To this end, Charan's next move was an attempt to formalise and centralise the increasing cross-nation scope and potential of the game. In 1981, Charan set-up, from his modest home in Coventry, the World *Kabaddi* Federation. This represented Sarwan Singh Charan's apogee in terms of South Asian Sports administration and promotion on a undeniably international scale:

India had its own *kabaddi* federation, Pakistan had its federation, and even we had our own sports federation here. My friends in Canada and in India and Pakistan as well, all told me that I should set up a world *kabaddi* federation, so I did. It helped to make it easier for

kabaddi teams from the different countries to go and do tours and play in each other's countries. Nobody really liked to do the work to organise these tours, so when we had a World *Kabaddi* Federation all the organisation could be done from one place. The World Federation is now the real authority for international *kabaddi*. I am very proud and happy about that. (Charan)

Whilst Charan has worked tirelessly to develop and promote Punjabi-Sikh sport world-wide for more than thirty-five years, he has concentrated largely on the game of *kabaddi*. Although it is still the major 'crowd-puller', the foremost attraction for Punjabi-Sikh sports enthusiasts in Britain, it has been joined in its position of esteem and popularity by the sport of football. The common venue for both football and *kabaddi* gave rise to a particular, very special and, notably peculiar atmosphere enveloping the totality of the games. Thus it is requisite here to explore the holistic experiential realities of the tournaments as not just sporting events, but as carnival.

6.3 THE MIS-RULE OF CARNIVAL – PLAYING AT THE *SHAHEEDI* GAMES

One of the fundamental purposes of the *Shaheedi* Games was to offer the immigrant Punjabi-Sikh community in Britain a chance to enjoy sport in a safe, ethno-culturally homogenous environment in which to participate actively as both players and spectators. Indeed, the spectating, or rather, the non-playing aspect of the tournaments has become almost as totemically significant as an index of the *Shaheedi* Games as

the actual sports themselves. The weekend event of the tournaments came to represent (and continues to do so, although now to a lesser extent) a break from the normal social order that structured the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs. For entire families, from small children, women as well as men, through to the elderly, the tournaments were as much social occasions as they were sporting.

A common element pervasive throughout all tournaments, regardless of the city or venue in which they are held, is the presence of copious amounts of alcoholic beverages. It has become an accepted 'tradition' of the Games that for the two days (particularly on the Sunday, when all finals are held), Punjabi-Sikh men are allowed to drink as much alcohol as their livers and/or desires can tolerate. It is common practise for a number of tournament revellers to travel to the site of the Games in a single car or van or even hired minibus bringing with them crates of lager and bitter and perhaps a case of spirits (typically whiskey or rum) with which to enjoy the sports played out before them. Car parks at the tournaments can be seen full of assorted vehicles with tailgates opened wide and boots serving as *ad hoc* bars from which drinks are served. Soft drinks are also supplied for refreshment purposes for children, for mixing with liqueur and for those abstaining on religious grounds. It is somewhat of an anomalous ambiguity that such plentiful supplies of alcohol are consumed by Punjabi-Sikhs at a sporting event that eponymously pays homage to a Sikh martyr and is organised by the Sikh temple, when one of the defining tenets of

the faith itself strictly prohibits the consumption of alcohol or intoxicants in any form. It appears that hypocrisy can often be a near neighbour of religiosity. In fact, this paradox is further legitimised by the popular notion of Punjabi-Sikh's having extraordinarily high tolerance levels for alcohol, hence their extravagant consumption of it. Punjabi people are renowned for their generous hospitality, serving food and drink to visitors and consuming food and drink whilst visiting are obligations joyfully observed. However, the presence of alcohol at the tournaments is tolerated, if not excused by the religiously devout, *Gurdwara*-based organisers. Manmohan Singh, a veteran Birmingham tournament organiser with Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* Shelby explained this selective liberalism:

We would never allow alcohol or any drugs in the *Gurdwara*, but outside, people will do what they want. Sports should be enjoyed by all, and some people enjoy more when they have drinks. Before people went to pubs when the matches were being played. But then they brought their own drinks so that they could stay at the tournament. The tournaments are for people to enjoy, we do not want to stop people's enjoyment. We all like to see people happy. (Manmohan Singh)

The provision of free food (*langar*, supplied by the organising *Gurdwara*) has been usurped by the proliferation of fast food stalls and trailers that use the tournaments to make extortionate profits. Hotdogs, burgers, an assortment of savoury Indian snacks such as *samosas* and *pakor*as, soft drinks, ice-creams and even Indian sweets are now readily available at most tournaments across the country. Traders buy 'pitches' from the councils under whose jurisdiction the tournament may be subject, granting them sole rights (along with select others who may have similar trading permission) to sell

their fast-food products at whatever rate they deem appropriate. Whilst many still take advantage of the complimentary *langar* that is still offered, the sheer volume of attendees at the tournaments quickly exhausts the food supplied by the *Gurdwaras*. Equally, the divergent palates of the ‘punters’ allows for a variety of food vendors to profitably sell their wares. As is often the case regardless of social and environmental context, home-cooked food is the first choice for many revellers at the *Shaheedi* Games. Previously, the women were required to cook large pots of curries (meat-based and vegetarian) for the men-folk to devour with friends and relatives at the tournaments, but increasingly, such modes of catering have become the responsibility of the men themselves – he who is going to eat it, cooks it. The experiences of women and girls during the duration of the tournaments shall be discussed later in this chapter; the Games provided female Punjabi-Sikhs with opportunity for merriment of a somewhat contrasting order. It is not uncommon for curries (*dhal*) and *rotis* (chapattis), along with *parathe* (double *rotis* with spicy vegetable fillings) and *achar* (pickle) to be served from vans and cars with cans of lager, with which food can be washed down. For those who are able to provide such catering without undue monetary loss, it is a show of generosity that is gladly performed. Jagtar Singh Nahar was one such person able to provide large amounts of food for other tournament-goers to communally enjoy:

We all get together and have a good time and we watch the *kabaddi* matches and the football, everyone has a good time. When we are all together like that people like to have a drink and forget about work and everything, just relax you know. Every year I have lots of food made by my workers who are very good cooks. We bring it to the tournaments in vans and sometimes on the big trucks we use in the dairy. Anyone who

comes up to the vans and is hungry, we give them some *tandoori* chicken or some *dhal* and *roti* and everyone is happy. (Nahar)

Whilst older Punjabi-Sikh men are able to zealously indulge their culinary, alcoholic and jocular appetites with gay abandon, if not wanton disregard, attending youngsters too have ample opportunity and scope for playful merriment. Young Punjabi-Sikh boys from the ages of approximately five and upwards, are allowed to roam around the grounds of the tournaments relatively free from the (often inebriated) gaze/jurisdiction of fathers or male guardians. Many play football in any 'spare' goals that may be left temporarily unused, or create their own spontaneous matches with other children. It is a typical characteristic of most young children that given conditions of relative freedom from parental control and the company of other mischievously like-minded associates, no end of fun and trouble can be attained. There are numerous incidents of children straying too far from fathers or uncles or older brothers, but frantic, near-unintelligible appeals on public announcement systems are usually sufficient to recover lost persons. Despite the abundance of playing opportunities for youngsters in the football competition, (at under-12 and under-16 levels) it is a sign of the residual popularity of the game in the Punjabi-Sikh communities that so many youngsters remain outside of the cliques of different clubs and extract their own pleasure from playing the game on their own terms and in their own teams. However, there are many who go along to tournaments to support friends who play in certain teams, or whose brothers or cousins play for senior teams. We have now arrived at a point whereby a Punjabi-Sikh father can play in the over-35's football competition, then watch an elder son compete in the first team competition.

and go on to support a younger son in the under-12's or under-16's tournament. The father of the over-35's player himself may have played at an earlier age but now contents himself with being a supportive spectator. For adolescent Punjabi-Sikh young men, the tournaments can represent a nascent experience of independence and liberation in a variety of forms: from experimentation with alcohol (in a milieu in which the consumption of alcohol is not just tolerated, but convivially advocated), to the more sober enactment/negotiation of ethnic and group identity/consciousness. This is an area of debate that I shall return to in greater detail, but in this section, the festive nature of the tournaments, in their resistance of the accepted, 'ordinary' order of daily existence shall be located within the realms of the carnivalesque.

As stated above, tournaments are held over the course of a weekend during the summer months. The grand finale (in various senses of the term) of the *Shaheedi* Games event occurs on the Sunday, when competition finals take place. In the case of the Birmingham tournament, the finals of the football and *kabaddi* tournaments are held on the same site although at different times. This sole location then lends itself to the creation of a unique atmosphere that is fuelled by a special exhilaration that anticipates the dramatic climax to any great sporting occasion/event. Allied to this is the jovial convergence that makes up the collective mass that partakes of the tournament almost as much as any player of any sport. The consumption of various foods and alcoholic beverages (often to excess), the geniality between friends and

relatives (some who may not see each other during any other time in the year), the relative freedom from domesticity, toil and work/business/occupational conditions. normally due solemn consideration, and the collective knowledge of ethno-cultural homogeneity and majority, all combine to manufacture an extra-ordinary and alterior order of existence – however transient it may be. This is when the tournaments become carnival.

One of the foremost proponents of theories of the carnival is the Russian critic Bakhtin who concentrates on expressions of carnival in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and locates much of his critical exploration in the literary works of the French writer Rabelais, whom, according to Bakhtin, “western literary critics and writers place immediately after Shakespeare or even next to him” (Bakhtin, 1984:1). The central idea of ‘the world turned upside down’, prevalent in Bakhtin’s work, is further developed to propose an outline of the carnivalesque in which a ‘second life’ is manufactured: “a completely different, non-official, extra-ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations... a second world and a second life outside officialdom...” (p.6). For those Punjabi-Sikhs involved in the tournaments (as players, spectators or organisers), a ‘different world’ is created in the sense that the tournament is a sporting occasion, a cultural world specific to Punjabi-Sikhs, an event that is virtually unrecognised and unknown to the outside world, the world of the white majority rule. The officialdom of white hegemony (however

ephemerally and artificially) is seemingly relegated for the Epicurean few hours of the final Sunday of tournament competition. The crowd of tournament spectators is an integral and crucial component in the interpretation of the Games as carnival, a phenomenon very much in keeping within the Bakhtinian framework:

carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people: they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants (p.7).

The performatively sportive participants of the tournaments (i.e. those that take part in the various sporting competitions themselves) are a minority not separate from the greater mass of the crowd of spectators who cheer them on, applaud their prowess, laugh their ineptitude, celebrate their success and commiserate on their losses. Indeed, the crowd are just as much spectacle, living inside the carnival and not merely observing from the outside. The excess associated with the tournaments, particularly that of food and (alcoholic) drink, the merriment, jocularly and high spirits has come to be regarded as the accepted and perpetuated *modus operandi* of the *Shaheedi* Games. Whilst the Games are taking place, “there is no other life outside” (ibid.). The perceived autonomy of the tournaments maintains its illusionary veneer because of the mono-ethnic populace that exists in the artificial world created by and experienced within (however naively) the event itself. Bakhtin's notion of the carnival as conducive to the ‘world's revival and renewal’ has a special poignancy

when mapped over the terrain of the *Shaheedi* Games. The world which Punjabi-Sikhs seek to revive and renew is that which was left behind at the point of migration. For those Punjabi-Sikh immigrants that came to this country as adults, the memory of a particular cultural pursuit/mode of existence and operation that was particular to the Punjab, is recreated through the enactment of the tournaments. Through their distinct propagation of an idealised Punjabi-Sikh brotherhood united under the manufactured auspices of sporting occasion, and via their playing out of sport unique to the Indian subcontinent in its ancestry and cultural significance (the game of *kabaddi*), the tournaments can be seen to represent an attempt to revive and renew, or rather replicate, the image and sensorial experience of certain aspects of Punjabi culture, i.e. playing and watching the game of *kabaddi* in and amongst other Punjabi people, all revelling in the abandon afforded by a downing of tools, whether they be a scythe or plough, spanner or lathe, pen or calculator or crates for delivering milk or sacks for moving potatoes. In the more succinct words of one tournament regular: ‘for one or two days, we just try and bring a little bit of the Punjab to England’ – renewing, reviving and replicating a world that may have been forsaken, but not forgotten.

As noted earlier, the Punjabi agrarian heritage and tradition is celebrated in India in the form of the *Rairpur Khela*. This celebration of agriculture and farming and of yielding crops is similarly carnivalesque as it also serves as an interlude, a break from the norm, or as Bakhtin puts it, “an escape from the usual official way of life” (p.8).

The *Shaheedi* Games tournaments in Britain are a translation (an approximate translation owing to the intrinsic processes and conditions of migration) of the *Rairpur Khela*. Common sports such as *kabaddi*, tug-of-war, athletics events and weight-bearing competitions are surface emblems of a shared outward discourse, the fact of their construction of an ulterior momentary order (when play unequivocally displaces, moreover usurps work) is a more forcible marker of their commonality. For Bakhtin, the carnival is an organic enigma with a genetic conformation that links it back to “ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature” (ibid.). The festivities occasioned and enjoyed at the *Rairpur Khela* are based in just such an agrarian nature. Indeed the majority of Punjabi-Sikhs belong to the *jat* caste, the caste of land-owning farmers ancestrally rooted in agrarian life. For the Punjabi-Sikh men who cultivate land, operate industrial machinery and perform other manual labour, the tournaments, are an opportunity to be grasped with both hands and subsequently elevated to a station above that of a simple, singular sporting event because allow the biting realities of toil, and often struggle, to be set aside and forgotten, albeit briefly. It is the older members of Punjabi-Sikh communities for whom this type of work was commonplace who created not just the *Shaheedi* Games, but also the unique atmosphere of revelry, merriment and vivacious abandon that distinguishes the tournaments from any other similar event, sporting or otherwise. Overlaying the template of the carnival(esque) on top of a sporting paradigm is not an original undertaking. Blake has argued (within a Bakhtinian referential framework) that:

sport in seventeenth century Britain involved mass public participation as both participants and observers, in activities which were constrained by space and time. Behaviour however, was often given license rather than

controlled by rules. Sport was an aspect of carnival, in which normal rules of social hierarchy and acceptable behaviour were suspended or inverted (1996:46).

This ‘licensing’ of behaviour, the suspension or inversion of ‘normal rules of social hierarchy and acceptable behaviour’ bear striking parallels with the experience of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. It is necessary however, to illustrate the modes and experience of marginalisation as it impacts and has impacted on Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain, which in turn form the basic rubrics of the accepted conventions and rules that the carnival world of the tournaments seemingly suspend or invert.

For most ethnic minority communities in Britain, particularly those that are visibly discernible/distinguishable, forms of social exclusion, economic disadvantage and cultural intolerance are not uncommon injustices propagated by the dominant, prevailing culture, i.e. white Britain. For the earlier Punjabi-Sikh immigrant settlers in this country, racial segregation was a lawful form of oppression. They received the lowest wages for doing the ‘dirtiest’ jobs, were forced to live in poor standards of housing/accommodation, tolerated dismissive, racially charged, often abusive treatment at the hands of members of the majority ‘host’ white population, and generally, made to feel as though they were foreigners in a land where the way of life that they had known was virtually incompatible. For younger Punjabi-Sikhs, most of whom were born in Britain, such licit, almost systemic subordination of ethnic

minorities has been not so much a phantom inequity, but rather a residual ghost that haunts their syncretic existence in a multiplex of transferred guises. Racially delineated stereotyping, continued economic and social under-privilege, disproportionately higher ratios of unemployment, poorer housing, narrower educational opportunities and the sustained persistence of racisms, prejudicial ideologies that permeate throughout various tangible aspects of everyday life, all remain as enduring pin-pricks, or at times, violent incisions in the flesh of those ethnic minorities in Britain.²⁹ Within this existential framework and within this type of synthetically engineered milieu, where it is possible for an ethnic minority to assume a perceived position of numerical majority (if not virtual totality) - one of autonomy and of a homogenising equality, a palpable sense of the unusual and where the conditions of existence are perceived to be re-ordered - a real sense of carnival can be at least a sentient 'reality'. This is a reality that, "celebrate[s] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (p.10). The prevailing truth from which Punjabi-Sikhs seek liberation is that of their ascribed status as an ethnic minority, that is where a sub-group whose cultural forms, religion, language, food, dress and, quite crudely, skin tone, represent points of contrast and conflict when aligned alongside (or rather behind) the imperious modes and conditions as applied by and to the majority white British population, can savour/experience a transitory moment of the reversal of such an order. Punjabi-Sikhs

²⁹ These conditions of discrimination and disadvantage do not affect all ethnic minorities in equal measure or in the same manner. Indeed, even within the Punjabi-Sikh communities, racism and prejudice is experienced differently by different people, with those who have advanced economically are able to by-pass many of the areas of potential/possible conflict and consternation.

are the majority in the tournaments – it they who have ‘created’ and control the world of the tournament. They are free to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow they return to work and ‘normality’. Tournament veteran (both as player and active participatory spectator) Sonam Singh Govind gave the following view:

everywhere you go in the tournament you will know someone, you will know a lot of people. There are all the families, I have so many brother-in-laws, cousins, friends, all brothers. Even if you don’t know someone, because it is the tournament they are your friend, your brother, you are all the same. I can wear my *kurta pajama* (cotton jersey and pyjamas) outside, it is like we are in India, it is an Indian world. (Govind)

There is a palpable sense of equality that is intimated in such accounts of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. A unifying sense of brotherhood is evident in expressions such as, ‘everyone is like one big family’ and ‘at the tournaments everyone is the same’. Again, this is not how all Punjabi-Sikh men would regard others of the same ethno-cultural band at all other times, however the occasion of the tournaments imbues their interaction with one another with a sense of a shared experience, where every participant is aware that the unique conditions of the tournaments are not replicated in any other sphere of their lives. It is questionable whether or not they have any desire for such conditions to exists outside of the alternative world of the tournament. As noted earlier, the wealthy Punjabi-Sikh businessmen have come to assume a prominent role in the continuation and nature of the competition of the tournaments. It is perhaps a significant negative indictment on the manner in which a collective Punjabi-Sikh psyche has evolved since the inception of the Sikh religion in the Punjab, that material wealth and fiscal prosperity have

come to be regarded as a potent indices of human achievement and position. It is with such a conception of individual evaluation that those Punjabi-Sikhs who have succeeded in business pursuits, having attained wealth and 'raised' social standing in the process, are viewed almost as a higher caste by those without similar levels of monetary wealth or prominent business ventures. Veneration, respect and often obsequiousness mark relations between those who have and those who would like to have. Again, the tournaments serve not so much to invert such a position, moreover, to momentarily negate and deny it. This is instigated and maintained from both sides of such a materially-formulated power divide. Jagtar Singh Nahar drew this point out:

Everyone eats and drinks together, my workers even laugh at me and make fun, we all laugh, it is for everyone to enjoy. They can have a joke at me, and they know that I take no harm from it. Next day, I am the boss again and business has to be done properly. I serve food and pour drinks when we are at the tournaments. I am not a boss or a businessman then, I am just another man enjoying the sports and the company of my friends. (Nahar)

The observed and preserved equality amongst tournament revellers, alongside other concomitant conditions of the irregular and the dis-conforming, crystallise this sense of the carnival(esque). The schismatic segregation (however tacit, or otherwise) that is evidently in operation in the everyday interactions of Punjabi-Sikh men (schisms loosely and unutterably defined and patrolled along the lines of wealth and social standing) are suspended whilst the tournaments are in play. The very act and nature of over-turning such divisions is an immanent recognition of at once their artificiality and also of the seeming immutability. Caste, it seems, has found re-incarnation in a

newer system of the material. For Bakhtin too, the medieval carnival provided a similar disavowing riposte to the mechanisms of social sequestering:

all were considered equal during the carnival... a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal of the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind (ibid.).

The extrapolation of Bakhtin's work that has been formulated around the experience of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments may suggest that the 'carnival experience' has found 'unique' transmigration in the body of these tournaments. The 'truly human relations' of medieval carnivals are very much 'imagined' and 'experienced' by those present at the tournaments. However, the idealism - the utopian egalitarian re-birth of human relations - is, however potent or 'real' the experience, a knowing theatrical illusion.

Rabelais uses the term 'Quaresmeprenant' meaning 'carnival' in medieval French. "as a word designating either the personification of or the collective term for the

revelry-filled days preceding Lent" (Kinser. 1990:10). The notion of indulgent excess prior to a period of abstinence and also as a kind of permitted compensation for routinist toil, does have analogous merit when regarded alongside the tournaments. Although the tournaments take place sometime after the Lenten period, they nevertheless occur during a time of long days, warmer temperatures and the unpredictable seasonal summer sunshine. Indeed, in medieval Europe "the Carnival-Lent boundary tended over time to fuse and become confused with lay people's celebrations of the year's turning toward outdoor activities, warmth and light" (p.47). The staging of the *Shaheedi* Games from the beginning of British summertime allows Punjabi-Sikh sports fans to enjoy the capricious warmth and sunshine of the summer weather. The tournaments are specifically outdoor events; football and *kabaddi* (the main tournament activities) are played and watched outdoors. For many Punjabi-Sikhs living in Britain, much time is spent indoors, going from home to work with little by way of exterior enjoyment. Indeed, for older Punjabi-Sikhs, walking in the open fields in the villages in India represent their main leisurely association with the outdoors. Traditional Punjabi (rural) life is actually rooted in the outdoors: the clement climate is a natural reason for much of Punjabi village life to take place outdoors of the home or workplace. In Britain, where the weather not quite as mild for much of the year, the tournaments are an opportunity for Punjabi-Sikhs (particularly older Punjabi-Sikhs) to appreciate a familiar sense of a warm external environment. Excessive indulgence during tournaments is fleeting as the knowledge that such hedonism is only permitted on the condition that much of the rest of the year is dedicated to working, can occasion over-zealous abandon. The sporting spectacle

of the tournaments can be regarded as becoming fused and confused with the onset of summer, of warmth and light, with conditions reminiscent of Indian summers and is vigorously, although briefly, enjoyed as such.

The more commonly used term ‘Mardi Gras’ (literally meaning ‘Fat Tuesday’) has become synonymous with the idea of carnival helped in the main by the global notoriety of Rio de Janeiro’s flamboyant Mardi Gras street festival. Whilst the increased corporatisation of the Rio Mardi Gras has led some commentators to question its very status as ‘carnival’ (Cohen, 1993; Taylor, 1982), the Trinidad carnival does merit analysis in respect of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. Prior to the abolition of slavery in 1834, the Trinidad carnival “was an affair of the white elite and within their own circle of people of mixed origin” (van Koningsbruggen, 1997:14). It was this hegemonic group of white French Catholics that organised balls, concerts and hunting parties (amongst other activities) during the carnival season which extended from Christmas to Ash Wednesday. During this time the black presence at the carnival was tolerated because the services they provided “sometimes obliged them to attend” (p.15). Following the emancipation of the slaves, the relatively genteel carnival that was hitherto the social and cultural domain of the white French Creole plantocracy, “passed into the hands of the [black] lower classes and changed into a noisy, wild and disorderly amusement, viewed with increasing disdain by the well-to-do and with suspicion by the authorities” (ibid.) (my

parenthesis). However, prior to ‘liberated’ black involvement in the Trinidad carnival, the years of enslavement had forced slaves to shackle their revelry and banish it to realms outside of the ruling, reproaching white glare:

[I]n the slave plantations of the Caribbean Africans existed in two worlds. There was the world of the day; that was the white world. There was the world of the night; that was the African world, of spirits and magic and the true gods. And in that world ragged men, humiliated by day, were transformed – in their own eyes, and the eyes of their fellows – into kings, sorcerers, herbalists, men in touch with the true forces of the earth and possessed of complete power. A king of the night, a slave by day... To the outsider, to the slave-owner, the African night world may appear a mimic world, a child’s world, a carnival. But to the African – however much in daylight, he appeared himself to mock it – it was the true world: it turned white men to phantoms and plantation life to an illusion (Naipaul, 1985:136).

By the end of the eighteenth century, African slaves came to represent the majority population in Trinidad. Despite numerical advantage white rule was strictly pervasive, even after the abolition of slavery. Africans were needed “for the development of crops such tobacco, cacao, spices and sugar for the expanding European markets” (van Koningsbruggen, 1997:10). In post-war Britain the industrial boom of the 1950s heralded the arrival of thousands of immigrants from the former colonies of South Asia and the West Indies. The New Commonwealth immigrants were not forced labourers, but invited workers drafted into the country to fill the ever-burgeoning gaps in the British labour market that the indigenous population could no longer occupy. Immigrants were not slaves, but similar to African slaves in the Caribbean, South Asian immigrants were exposed to overt racist practices (Anwar,

1997). Second-class citizenship stamped a mark of immanent inferiority on South Asian (and black) immigrants in Britain, marking them as different, lesser human-beings and rendering this new diasporic British sub-group as a lowly substitute workforce whose worth was in the value of their labour. Any possible contributions to the socio-cultural, intellectual and political advances that immigrant communities could offer the 'host' nation were of minor concern: demanding manual labour, poor housing and low wages were the prevailing standards for post-war South Asian settlers. Indentured labour was not slave labour, but the conditions of second-class citizenship that early South Asian immigrants experienced as a lived reality inexorably resulted in a strict divide, a 'them' and 'us' division of power, wealth and status between the dominant, ruling white majority and the subordinate, 'second-class' ethnic minorities in Britain. The comparisons with Trinidadian African slaves is contextual - inferior standards of living and subordinate citizenship were common conditions under which both African slaves in the Caribbean and pioneering South Asian immigrants in Britain lived.

Before their emancipation from slavery, the Trinidadian African slaves sought spiritual and physical 'release' of their own. With the carnival being the principle domain of the white elite, they took ephemeral occupation of the nocturnal world that Naipaul (1985) describes. Enforced toil and bondage indelibly scarred their 'normal' working day. The night, however could legitimately be spent overturning such

subordination and under the dark cover of night, “ragged men, humiliated by day, were transformed... into kings, sorcerers, herbalists, men in touch with the true forces of the earth and possessed of complete power” (p.136). Punjabi-Sikh immigrants in Britain may not have suffered equivocal degrees of violent ignominy as endured by the African slaves, but they too were excluded from the mainstream festivities and popular white British public celebrations at first, by draconian legislation and subsequently by the unwillingness of many white Britons to allow immigrants entry into white cultural ‘preserves’ (Anwar, 1991). Social clubs, pubs and hotels were amongst the public venues where non-white immigrants were strictly prohibited. Racial segregation in the early years of chain migration to Britain was quite widespread (Holmes, 1991) and so immigrant communities, somewhat similar to African slaves in Trinidad, negotiated and invented their own cultural celebrations and festivities. The *Shaheedi* Games tournaments presented Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain with a world in which they were not drafted subordinate labourers, but rather men amongst equals, momentarily free from minoritisation, racial discrimination and arduous toil. Such men, who suffered varying degrees (and modes) of humiliation in the ordinary circumstances of their nascent diasporic existence, were allowed by the tournament world to be “transformed – in their own eyes, and the eyes of their fellows – into... men in touch with the true forces of the earth and possessed of complete power” (Naipaul, 1985:136). The mono-ethnic make-up of the tournaments was conducive to manufacturing this artificial but secular sense of ‘complete power’. It was not a twilight world of sorcery or magic that empowered these Punjabi-Sikhs - Sikhism outwardly shunned aspects of superstition and religious supernaturalism that

were endemic within the major part of India - but it was the corporeal elements of their culture that they sought to observe and indulge. The celebration of the vaunted Punjabi-Sikh physicality, the competitive zeal of a traditional Punjabi sport (*kabaddi*), the insignia of Sikh temples and of the religion itself emblazoned on tracksuits, tents and vans, the consumption of Punjabi food, the ubiquitous presence of Punjabi people and of course the popular Punjabi indulgence of liberal alcoholic intake all combined to effect this illusory autonomy.

The early *Shaheedi* Games tournaments were singular moments that superficially denied the power of majority rule and contradicted the social alignment of minoritisation. For the course of the tournament, white men were turned to phantoms as Punjabi-Sikh men ordered their time and recreation for themselves. As with the pre-abolition days in Trinidad when Caribbean Africans stole the night to play out their own carnival in which they were exalted free men, the socio-scape of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments too could appear to the outsider, as Naipaul suggests, like “a mimic world, a child’s world, a carnival” (ibid.). However, Punjabi-Sikhs actively created this ‘carnival’ world as recreation and re-creation, as sport and ‘play’ and something markedly of the Punjab. Unlike the African slaves’ nocturnal carnival world, the tournaments were officially sanctioned by the white British local authorities. Punjabi-Sikhs were not guilty of any legal or political transgression, but they did however pointedly apply pressure to the parameters of social strata. To

manufacture conditions of self-governance, of mono-ethnic majority in the context of specialised cultural celebration (as the *Shaheedi* Games were) was an impressive achievement for a newly relocated ethnic group. What may be viewed by an ethnic minority as a victory for cultural independence and solidarity, may be considered by the ruling majority as a permissible means by which to placate the minority, offer it a temporary and sanctioned relief from the realities of its oppressed state, a functional opiate of the minorities. This Marxist critique does have some credence in relation to the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments. In his *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* (1843), Marx referred to religion as "the opium of the people" (quoted in Pierson, 1997:49). The idea of carnival as a momentary inversion of the conditions of the 'real' world, of the world turned upside down, correlates with Marx's proposition of religion as "an inverted world-consciousness" (p.48). This is a world-consciousness that disavows the centrality of man's agency in its affairs and posits religion as a "universal source of consolation and justification" (p.49). The Marxian position that the proletariat are the dupes of a state order in which religion acts as an opiate to intoxicate, placate and regulate the masses finds a certain degree of resonance in the tournament world. The indulgence of a minority group in its sportive fancies (when sanctioned by the dominant group) does not represent a substantial threat to the rule of the dominant group. Put simply, give the minorities a controlled dose of what they want and that will keep them quiet. To paraphrase Marx, the tournaments are the opium of the Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain. The false sense of autonomy, majority and cultural dominance that the tournament world can create may be viewed as an authorised illusion that serves the purposes of

the ruling majority by allowing a differentiated minority group to exercise social and cultural practises that may be contrary to the dominant norm. Since such exercise is countenanced by the dominant group, any residue sense of the actual conditions of the *status quo* being overthrown is merely an “illusory happiness” (ibid.), another false and falsifying consciousness. Marx claimed that, “[T]o abolish the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness” (ibid.). Punjabi-Sikhs may feel a relative degree of happiness, but within this type of Marxian framework this is simply a deflective happiness, one that distracts them from their real conditions of minoritisation. Their ‘real’ happiness would purportedly lie in equality of employment, housing, wages, education, social status, citizenship and public regard. In the absence of this kind of happiness, the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments offered a transient, intransigent joy, one that did not wholly dupe Punjabi-Sikhs. In the words of one tournament reveller: ‘it is nice for our men to come to the tournaments and forget their worries. It is only two days. Who doesn’t want to forget everything and be happy? That’s why they come to the tournaments’.

The functional opiate model of maintaining hegemony echoes through the sentiment of the above Punjabi-Sikh respondent. ‘To forget and be happy’ can be regarded as a victory for the ruling majority over the demands of the minority. The Rio Carnival in Brazil is another popular celebratory form in which those outside of the ruling classes can ‘forget and be happy’. The Rio Carnival is no longer an open street party, it now

largely takes place in the ‘Sambadrome’ where the cheapest seat costs US\$40 the equivalent of one month’s wage for many taking part in the event (Cohen, 1993). The wealth generated by the Carnival is not shared by the poorer contributors that form an essential part of its production and consumption. nor is it viewed strictly as carnival. as Cohen (1993:136) elaborates:

there are many Brazilians... who question whether the Sambadrome three-day parade is carnival at all. It looks more like an entertainment directed by the middle classes and ruling groups, using the masses of blacks as performers... [T]he extra money gained in this way helps in mounting yet more lavish floats in more sophisticated presentation in the next carnival while the black members... and their *favela* communities remain in poverty in their squalid slums and even continue to pay the bulk of the cost of their own costumes by instalments throughout the year. This is why the Rio Carnival is often dubbed the opium of the people (his italics).

The stark difference between the Rio Carnival and the tournaments is that the latter does not inflict any harsh financial costs of participation on those who enjoy the event as either players or spectators. The *Shaheedi* Games are not for profit. The subordinate groups such as black and indigenous Indian communities in Brazil most often only hold performative roles in the Carnival, they have little ownership of the Mardi Gras’s commercial opulence, nor do they have any major part in its organisation. This contrasts with the Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain who arrange, run and participate in the tournaments. The history of the Rio Carnival is entrenched in the colonial period of Portuguese rule when it:

consisted of violent games where people threw all sorts of objects at one another. It was a popular Dionysian festivity and the upper classes gradually began to take part in it. Starting with the First Republic, Carnival began to lose its characteristics, becoming largely a performance show (Rector, 1984:42).

The *Shaheedi* Games have never witnessed the participation of the ruling group in the course of their sporting carnival. The usurpation of the Rio Carnival by the 'upper classes' in Brazil has engendered its ensuing formalised corporatisation, a process that has lined the pockets of the already wealthy and allowed the destitute to continue in poverty whilst made to retain the costly practice of 'putting on a show' for the Carnival/performance. For the poor, colonised sections of the Brazilian population, the Carnival is a bitter-sweet marker of the impact of colonial rule on their cultural essence. The carnival/tournaments that take place in various parts of Britain do not involve such acerbic relations between colonial rulers and former colonial subjects. The *Shaheedi* Games are held in the country of the colonial power itself and have not been encroached upon by the ruling authority. Any moves toward increased commercialisation have been the result of internal pressures within the Punjabi-Sikh organising bodies themselves. While the tournaments may satiate a desire amongst sections of the Punjabi-Sikh communities in Britain to indulge certain fancies and cultural practises (sporting and otherwise), it is not done so at excessive cost. The tournaments do not require those who participate in them to foolishly spend time, effort and money on an event that will provide only brief and displaced respite from normal conditions that may (and do for many Brazilians living in the *favelas* of Rio) involve poverty and destitution. It is of considerable doubt that a tournament that

required such financial commitment would command the same respect and popularity amongst Punjabi-Sikhs as the *Shaheedi* Games continue to do. Even as an opiate, such changes to the constitution of the tournaments would be difficult to swallow.

In Britain, the idea of carnival is most popular recognised in the form of the Notting Hill Carnival held annually in London. This event was originally organised in 1966 as a means of reviving the abandoned Notting Hill Annual Fair that survived up until the turn of the twentieth century. By the early 1970s there was, “a dramatic change in the character of the London Carnival... it became national in scale and exclusively West Indian in its leadership, arts and most of the attendance” (Cohen, 1993:21). The Trinidad Carnival was studied by the organisers of the London event and they used those conventions to directly inform the content and course of a street fair in which such trajectories, “were closely interconnected with the economic and political upheavals that enveloped the West Indians in Britain generally and those of them who lived in the Notting Hill area in general” (ibid.). The prevalence of steel bands and grand theatrical floats are indeed inherited attributes of the Trinidad Carnival that now form a popular part of the Notting Hill equivalent. Originally the Notting Hill Fair was designed to resurrect the idea of an inclusive event that united a region in festivity, but the ethnic constituency of the region engendered greater West Indian influence which, allied with tensions concerning equality issues in employment, education and law and order, turned the evolution of the Notting Hill event from an

eclectic fair into a West Indian, essentially Trinidadian carnival. Cohen (1993) has traced the development of the Carnival as a cultural movement that has often reflected the changing conditions of African-Caribbean lives in Britain. As a reaction to the effects of being forgotten during the economic crises in the 1970s and to the destabilising of ethnic relations during the Thatcherite 1980s, the Notting Hill Carnival has acted as both a performative mouthpiece of African-Caribbean resistance and articulation in Britain, as well as a celebratory form of what may be called 'ethnic inclusionism'.

Unlike the less popularly known *Shaheedi* Games, the Notting Hill Carnival has come to attract participants and revellers from across Britain and is widely regarded as "the biggest street festival in Europe" (p.IX). People of any ethnic background attend the event and the Trinidadian steel bands have also been joined by the *dhol*-beats of Punjabi *bhangra* music, with South Asians contributing to the festive colour of the Carnival with their own floats, processions and displays that have become incorporated into the ethnic mainstream of the event's agenda. The irony here is that whilst aspects of South Asian culture, particularly popular culture are being subsumed into the popular body of a carnival event which is predominantly associated with African-Caribbean culture, one of the most enduring and popular celebrations within the South Asian population in Britain remains decidedly outside of the mass popular gaze. It may, in fact, be a point not to lament for whilst the tournaments resist the call

of national public notoriety. they retain a counter-cultural underbelly that continues to resist majority subsumption. Whilst the *Shaheedi* Games may not strictly be labelled as 'carnival', they are a cultural and ethnic movement that represent a celebratory mode of particularised articulation that operates exterior to the agenda of the dominant group. The very success and popularity of the Notting Hill Carnival has led to its increased accession to forces of control and constraint from outside of the ethnic minority group that it purportedly represents. Cohen (1993) offers the following description of how events such as the Notting Hill Carnival (and possibly in the future) the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments may evolve:

[A] cultural movement is *ipso facto* also a political movement. Carnival may ostensibly appear to be a pure cultural performance, but it is inevitably political from the start. As a celebration of release from the constraints of the social order it would attract those who are under endless pressure, the dispossessed and the oppressed. It might function as a cathartic safety valve at times, but unavoidably it soon becomes a security problem calling for the active intervention of the forces of law and order. If the problem does not degenerate quickly the state may attempt to co-opt it, thus, in effect, politicising it on a higher level for its own benefit (p.154).

The current issues surrounding the policing of crowds at tournaments do not merit undue concern for local authorities under whose jurisdiction the Games take place. Increased popularity, growing numbers of attendees/participants and greater public renown may occasion stronger state control. Recognition of the power that such events have over and for the people who co-ordinate and consume them, may lead to greater local and central government involvement in their organisation, and possibly

in their very function. With regard to both the Notting Hill Carnival and the possible future path of the *Shaheedi* Games, the counter-cultural element in such celebrations (as most emphatically in the case of the Rio Carnival) that occupies a space outside of the hegemonic clutches of the dominant group, struggle to resist the imposition of rule and form that is issued by that dominant group and not from within the minority group itself. With events of this type, carnival movements:

may succeed in realising [their] main goals or may end up becoming an opium of the masses, a cathartic mechanism serving as a safety valve which may even be inspired and be cultivated by the dominant group in its bid for hegemony (Cohen, 1993:154.) (my parenthesis).

Taking his cue from Hargreaves (1986), Blake (1996) further explores the relationship between sport and the Gramscian notion of hegemony by stating that:

sport is one of the ways in which a dominant group in society exercises power, not through physical dominance, or even through the imposition of a dominant ideology, but through negotiation. Things may, in this model, get better not smoothly or routinely, but after contestation and negotiation. Sport is here a battleground over which groups with conflicting interests contend for power (p.83).

Local government authorities that have granted Punjabi-Sikh communities permission to hold the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments around the country since 1965, and also which provided venues for them, may not have necessarily intended to exercise power over the minority group. Allowing Punjabi-Sikhs to stage their own sporting

and cultural event may have been read as an accession to this minority's demands to practise their cultural particularity outside of the dominant norm/domain. It seems more appropriate, indeed more progressive, to invoke the idea of negotiation and contestation that Blake (1996) outlines above. Such process required the thrust of a Punjabi-Sikh sporting movement that sought self-expression ahead of self-governance and the willingness of governing local authorities to permit such ethnic self-expression in times of social and political upheaval. The *Shaheedi* Games exist at this intersection. Their inceptive roots lie in this negotiation between the demands of an ethnic minority to partake of their particular social and cultural expressions within the physical and cultural territory of the white majority and this majority's struggle to accommodate such ethnic expressions within the anatomy of a society that strove to maintain cultural, political and ideological hegemony. The tournaments may here (particularly at their inauguration) be regarded as "a battleground over which groups with conflicting interests contend for power" (p.83), a site of struggle, but the contention of power is relative to the demands made in respect of staging the *Shaheedi* Games. There are no calls to arms to herald an ethnic uprising against the dominant majority, nor are there discriminate sanctions placed on the form of minority sporting/cultural expression by the localised official representatives of that majority. The continuum between these two poles incorporates a linear process of negotiation. The history and progression of the tournaments may not necessarily be a steady, uniform shift along that lineal continuum toward either total minority control and rule over such events, or total acceptance of majority governance. Instead, there is an exchange, not only in terms of the balance of power in relation to who owns and

runs the tournaments, but also in respect of the cultural content of the Games themselves. The incorporation of football into the national belly of the tournaments has increased Punjabi-Sikh participation in a sport that saturates British (popular) culture, a move that could be viewed as an acceptance of the inevitable pull of white cultural hegemony in Britain. By the same token, football in the tournaments is a valuable means by which Punjabi-Sikhs negotiate their own association with the English national game, within a sporting arena that promotes their identification with an ethnic culture outside of Englishness. Marx remarked that, “[R]eligion is the sigh of the oppressed creature” (quoted in Pierson, 1997:49). The loose interchangeability of religion and sport as applied to the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments throws forth further illuminating light on this phenomenon. Sport (in the guise of the tournaments) is not necessarily the ‘sigh of the oppressed creature’, as Marx would have it, it is instead an expression of the committed negotiation on the part of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain to maintain their own cultural traditions as well as partaking of those associated with the ruling majority, within a socio-political sphere that publicly does not seek to undermine their ethnic particularity. If the tournaments create a temporary world where that negotiation is reified into perceived existential conditions of transient minority autonomy, then this does not necessarily make dupes out of those who buy into it. By actively organising the tournaments in accordance with the demands of everyday working life as well as the restrictions on time, space and behaviour imposed by local authorities and the police, Punjabi-Sikhs are knowingly exposed to the dynamic artifice that gives life to the carnival world of the tournaments. The *Shaheedi* Games do not paper over the cracks that exist in the

negotiable landscape of Punjabi-Sikh diasporic existence in Britain, they take place in those cracks and use such fissures in the process of perpetual negotiation. This knowledge is not necessarily an impediment to the enjoyment of the tournaments, indeed, it may be a pre-requisite for them to be experienced as carnival.

There is a special and quite extra-ordinary atmosphere and ambience that is unique to the tournaments. The organic mechanisms of operation that function within the fluid anatomy of the Games are decidedly alterior and non-conventionally oppositional to the existing conditions of common intercourse that the componential elements within that anatomy normally experience/maintain. As noted above, this 'other world' of the tournaments is not one that is inhabited by a race of unknowing dupes. The Punjabi-Sikhs who attend these Games, whilst wholly enmeshed in the hedonistic exuberance of the events, do not entirely partake of such abandon and genial re-alignment of social parameters/etiquettes, with a completely ignorant, but happy oblivion to the regular, ordinary systems under and through which their lives are ordered. It is only with an acute understanding of the position that people occupy in any given society, of the modes of regulation that they observe and of their public relations with others, that a reversal of such orders can be effected: the world cannot be turned upside down if one does recognise what it looks like when it is the 'right', or rather, the usual way up. Thus, whilst the wealthy businessman with elevated status in the Punjabi-Sikh community may well 'serve' those who ordinarily would be working for him and

receive the jocular lampooning or mockery of men who would otherwise behave toward him with reverence and an almost servile respectful unfamiliarity. all parties involved would have an intimate knowledge and experience of the dynamics of the relations that were being transiently subverted. This same principle can be extended to the relations between the ethnic minority Punjabi-Sikh community and the dominant majority of white British society. Under the usual conditions of their existence in a country in which they represent a non-indigenous, foreign 'other' (even if the individual may have been born and raised in this country), Punjabi-Sikhs are unhesitatingly different, irregular residents as and when placed alongside the pervasive 'image' of a member of the numerically, economically, politically, religiously and culturally domineering and prevailing population. The popular multiculturalism that is touted (by various proponents) as a symbolic Zeitgeist of (post)modernity³⁰, is often experienced as an intolerant, if not at times oppressive, reality. This is not to say that there are no positive effects and possibilities of multiculturalist philosophies. However, all ethnic minorities are united in a common minoritisation, a subordination of their own cultural, religious and linguistic practices as different and 'other' as denominated by the existence of (and when placed adjacent to) the hegemonic society and culture within which they operate/reside. Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain are aware of their ethnicised and minoritised status in Britain. Despite having succeeded in a variety of professional, occupational, commercial and private domains, there is an abiding knowledge of the short history of residency in a country in which the real offices of power (governmental and economical) are unoccupied by

³⁰ For extended debates surrounding the transnational incarnations of 'multiculturalism' see Guiberneau, M. and Rex, J.(1997) *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and*

members of their own community. During the course of the tournament, this sober reality, or rather the understanding of this sober reality is knowingly usurped, turned upside down and ephemerally forgotten. The ordinary rules that impact upon their minoritised and ethnicised condition are lost in the tournament world where Punjabi-Sikhs are the majority, where Punjabi-Sikh rule is outwardly evident (in the form and presence of the temple officials who organise and officiate the events, in the body of the Punjabi-Sikh masses that represent the majority presence in the tournament world and Punjabi-Sikh sports men who play out Punjabi sports – in the form of *kabaddi*). The authority of white Britain, as enforced through the social, political and economic agents as outlined above, is seemingly denied as the rule of perceived autonomy is artificially bought-into and uncompromisingly accepted by the tournament attendees. The totality of this oppositional experience has to be viewed within the context of there always already existing an operating system which can knowingly be opposed. Without that knowledge or experience, subversion cannot take place, carnival cannot happen and the tournaments would be direct extensions of residual relational patterns. Eco's incisive critique of Bakhtin's musings on the carnivalesque, echo a similar sentiment:

Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognised and respected. One must know to what degree certain behaviours are forbidden, and must feel the majesty of the forbidding norm, to appreciate their transgression. Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible (1984:6).

‘The majesty of the forbidding norm’ is acutely felt by Punjabi-Sikhs for it proscribes excess, un-regulation and the dominant rule of ethno-cultural peculiarity. It is the forbidding norm of the imperious culture in a country in which Punjabi-Sikhs are a small sub-group of the population, which posits (one may even claim relegates) the social and cultural practices of any ethnic minority as secondary to the prevailing practices of the majority. Their difference is not only clothed in the robes of the ‘other’, of strangeness and ‘otherness’, but that difference is also ranked using the hegemonic numerical and cultural majority as the ubiquitous ‘control’. Eco states that “carnival can only exist as an *authorised* transgression” (his italics) (ibid.), and in the case of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments, the transgression of a mass of Punjabi-Sikhs playing their own sport under their own jurisdiction, amongst themselves and indulging manifold whims, can only exist if and when ‘authorised’ by the local councils and with the approval of the appropriate local police authorities. For the duration of the tournaments the (mis-)rule of carnival operates and reigns so as to create, moreover recreate, a small piece of Punjab and Punjabi culture on British shores. Since this illusory world does not have an overt political agenda, one which seeks to claim a territory and identity solely for the use and ownership of that particular group (e.g. the Khalistani movement in the Punjab itself, the call for a separate Sikh nation-state), it does not delude its occupants with the vacuous promise of self-government or socio-cultural and politico-economic equality within the wider society within which the tournament world exists. An absolute understanding and appreciation of the extra-ordinariness of the tournament world is what makes the act of turning the ‘ordinary’ upside-down sweeter, and indeed, possible. The end of the

Shaheedi Games is followed almost immediately with the acceptance of the conclusion of the un-real tournament world and resumption of the 'real' world of work, white British hegemony, ethnicised minoritisation and sobriety. This final, climactic act, when the un-real and real worlds collide to penetrate the tournament revellers with the realisation of the event's closure and the ineluctable accretion of the mundanities of the everyday life, is the both the apex and the nadir of the life of the tournament. The tournaments serve fleetingly to set aside the normal conditions of existence for Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain, but ultimately, most emphatically at the moment of their cessation, the tournaments, as according to Eco, "remind us of the existence of the rule" (ibid.), a sentiment that concords with the actual experiences of Punjabi-Sikh tournament attendees:

you see the police walking around in the tournaments, we know they are there, I know they have to be there, I have sat on many *Gurdwara* committee meetings with big officers and I know that without them tournament no would go ahead. Birmingham tournament has been a lot of trouble for two or three years because the local council don't want over-crowding, so the *Gurdwara* is forced to find bigger places for the *kabaddi* tournaments. We live in this country, it is England, not India. We vote for an English Government, not an Indian one. We all understand these things, but while the tournament is on, it feels like it is just about us. The tournaments are our own thing but we understand that we are still in England. Nobody is that stupid. (Sonam Singh Govind)

CHAPTER 7

DEDICATED FOLLOWERS OF PASSION – FOOTBALL AND BRITISH PUNJABI-SIKHS

Young Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain have shared and continue to share in the all-consuming passion that football generates and maintains. However, there are certain stark points of divergence where British Punjabi-Sikhs' association with and involvement in football has sharply contrasted with that of their white peers. Such divergent experiential paths occurred early on in the lives of young British Punjabi-Sikhs, indeed, school was where differing footballing fates were first visibly apparent. With racist hostilities enacted even in school playgrounds (sometimes most insidiously so), young Punjabi-Sikhs who attended British schools in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s struggled to occupy a small part of the school field on which to play out their own footballing fantasies. Indeed, as one veteran Punjabi-Sikh footballer, former GNG Shelby player Tony explained, self-preservation was a more pressing concern that preceded the wish to kick a football around a field:

there was a few of us who loved football and we liked playing it you know. But there were only a few of us. Some friends didn't even go to school. they had to find work or helped the family in the businesses or something. I had to work in my uncle's shop after school and sometimes in the morning before going to school as well. But, we couldn't play football with the

white guys because they wouldn't let us. We had to fight a lot of the time because they would start fights with us and pick on some of the girls as well. we had to protect the girls. (Tony)

The refusal of white (male) pupils to allow Punjabi-Sikhs to take part in ad hoc games of playground football, was composed of a more discriminating (ir)rationality than straight forward racist practice. Whilst black pupils were allowed to participate in these informal 'kick-about's', British South Asians were often forcibly denied entry into such sportive cliques. Tony continued:

the black guys played with the white guys, but they thought we were just crap at football. The white guys thought that the black guys were good enough to play with them, but we weren't. We still played football, we played in the park and for the *Gurdwara*. No-one really cared about school you know. (Tony)

This apathy toward school-based football for this generation of British Punjabi-Sikh pupils extended to the school team, a similar scenario as that uncovered by Fleming (1995) who found that the group of South Asian male pupils he referred to as 'Street-Kids' also shunned school-based sport (discussed in Chapter 1). Since South Asians were viewed with little sporting credentials at the time (a type of false racialisation of sporting abilities, obversely applied to black athletes in an attempt to 'explain' their successes in professional sport, discredited by *inter alia* Cashmore 1982a, 1990a, 1990b; Fleming, 2001), physical education teachers did not encourage greater participation in extra-curricular sport (in this case football) amongst South Asian

pupils.³¹ A form of tautology operated where since South Asian pupils were not actively encouraged to play in school teams or even try out for them. These pupils then internalised such an exclusionary approach as being inherently discriminatory and withdrew from this type of school-based sporting involvement. In turn, this withdrawal was used by physical education practitioners to illustrate the erroneously perceived South Asian sporting disinterest (Bayliss, 1989). But while school football may have been largely shunned by young British Punjabi-Sikhs, the more clandestine world of Punjabi-Sikh football flourished through their participation:

we played for GNG and that was that. There was me, Maan, and in those days Maan's little brother Tej was getting good as well. We didn't want to play for the school we had our own team, we played for our temple, for our religion, that was more important to us than school you know. (Tony)

Tony was not alone in his rejection of school sport. Such repudiation of institution-based sport was a common reaction to the overt racism that many young Punjabi-Sikhs faced, particularly during the 1970s when political nationalist groups such as the National Front were at their most prominent and popular. Sport in the official, recognised arenas was avoided for the possibility, if not the actuality, of racial abuse which always felt to be present. Thus, leisure centres, youth clubs, swimming pools and school sport (outside of physical education) were sporting spheres that Punjabi-Sikhs (indeed British South Asians as a whole) regarded as hostile grounds that were the domains of the white youth. In Chapter 5 it was evidenced how new Punjabi-Sikh

³¹ Klein (1993) has referred to the 'benign stereotype' of young South Asians as simply being high academic achievers with little interest in sport. This was the mode of thinking that precluded some teachers from viewing South Asian pupils in a sportive vein.

immigrants suffered open hostility from indigenous white Britons in various occupational and social spheres, and this invidious ignorance also colonised the playgrounds where many of the children of these immigrants were to later occupy. Fleming (1995) has shown that this type of fear of racially motivated harassment is still a primary concern for many young South Asians even today, asserting from his research that the ‘under-use’ of leisure facilities by South Asians can be attributed to “the verbal and physical abuse that young South Asians are subjected to on a daily basis, or, just as important, the expectation of harassment” (p.108). Whereas Fleming points to an internalisation of non-sporting stereotypes of South Asians by the young British South Asians in his study, it appears that young British Punjabi-Sikhs did not allow such ignorant ‘generalised’ images (as propounded by teachers and other pupils) to be projected onto their own sportive psyche. The abundance and sporting affluence of Punjabi-Sikh football teams (as well as *kabaddi*, hockey and volleyball teams) was a clear indication of this ethnic minority’s firm commitment to sport and penchant for it. Since this sporting, or more specifically footballing participation, occurred outside of the recognised fields of institutional sport/leisure, the Punjabi-Sikh love of soccer and commitment to, and aptitude for it, remained unnoticed. The *Shaheedi* Games were pointed markers for young Punjabi-Sikhs that sport was no stranger to them. Clubs such as Keaneston Rovers have regular training schedules, weekly formal matches in formal leagues and competitions. Even within the more surreptitious world (that is, to those outside of the Punjabi-Sikh community) of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments which may be deemed to be informal competitions, each match in every division is strictly arranged within the broader framework of the

competition and compete vigorously. It is difficult to gauge the South Asian sporting participation that Punjabi-Sikhs represent, simply because the accepted gauge that has been used is calibrated to a different specification, for a different cultural group in a different sporting environment. With such an established association with football in Britain, it seems somewhat incongruous that the elite-level of the game in this country has yet to boast the contribution of a single top-class Punjabi-Sikh footballer.

7.1 (IN)VISIBLE PLAYERS

The perceived absence of Punjabi-Sikhs, moreover, of the broad band of South Asians in Britain, from professional football is a subject that has received a fair deal of media and public attention (BBC T.V, 1991; Datar, 1989; Bose, 1996), yet the superficial and mono-directional perspective of the coverage has far from ameliorated the general ignorance about the topic, and has instead created a somewhat facile pseudo-rationale that begins to address the negativities of the issue without evincing their consequences. It has been the case for a number of years that many people, especially those within the governing bodies of football and the various gatekeepers to the professional ranks, have used the ‘invisibility’ of South Asians in professional football, to arrive at the simplistic assertion that this British ethnic minority has no great interest or aptitude for the sport. Bains’s (1995) *Asians Can’t Play Football* report distinguishes itself as a vital and informed interjection within the specific debate concerning South Asian absence from professional football, a debate that has

(until very recently) been afforded only generalised, facile conjecture. From his extensive research - which included the contribution of professional football clubs, South Asian players (at various levels and of various ages), coaches, teachers, referees and community and youth development officers - the report's author somewhat presciently uncovered a culpable order of ignorance and thinly disguised (often nakedly explicit) racism that had proscribed any sustained South Asian progression in the game. Some of the key findings showed that over half the professional club officials surveyed deemed football not to be popular among South Asians in Britain; a statistic which lost any credence it may have had in the response of young South Asian players who were avid followers of the game and held obdurate ambitions to pursue the sport professionally (Bains 1995:5). The ignorance of recognised football 'officials' further extended to their adherence to, and reproduction of, negative stereotypes of South Asians as a mass homogenised nebulous community. A popular and enduring myth of South Asian physical inferiority, with its associations of stamina and strength deficiencies, continues to predominate amongst such putative experts.³² As indeed misconceptions of the role of religion and culture (often regarded as interchangeable) in the lives of South Asians have resulted in a defensive closing of gates by their keepers - namely scouts, coaches and community officers. Remarks such as, “‘*You hear about Asians (sic) stopping practice to say their prayers*’”, and, “‘*...they don't like open changing rooms, their ethics don't allow it*’” (p.6), are sadly reflective of an anachronistic ideology that is perpetuated by the exclusive bastion of British football itself. There are of course other variables

³² See Fleming, S. (2001) 'Bannister: racial science and South Asian and black physicality'. in Carrington, B. and McDonald, I. (eds.). *'Race', Sport and British Society*

effected from within South Asian communities themselves. The report claimed that. “[T]he biggest obstacle to footballing progress... within the Asian [sic] community in Britain is that of parents’ apparent reluctance to support adequately to support their child’s efforts to pursue a career in professional football” (p.58). This finding must be set within the negative understanding that many South Asian parents have of football. The sanitised version of the footballing product that is disseminated through the air-brushed iconic images of David Beckham, Michael Owen or Denis Bergkamp, have yet to fully displace the lingering residue of hooliganism, violence and right-wing extremists. Although younger parents of South Asian children have lived much if not all their lives in full view of football’s transformation and may be more inclined to de-emphasise the previous period of soccer malaise. This may be encouraging more South Asian parents to support the footballing dreams of their children. The costs involved in taking a child (or more than one) to training, to matches, buying their football kits and boots, washing their kits, buying accessories such as shin-pads, football pumps, footballs, goalkeeping gloves and tracksuits may be too excessive for many South Asian parents to afford. Modood et al. (1997) have indicated that in some areas of Britain, and in some South Asian communities, principally the Bangladeshis and Pakistani-Muslims, families are surviving on or below the poverty line. Hence they would not possess the practical ability (even if they possessed the desire) to financially afford to pay for their children’s ambitions to play for the local junior team, and then the county team, and then the junior side of the local professional football club, and so on until their son was playing for Manchester United or Mansfield Town. There is little to suggest that South Asian prospective footballers

are deterred by the robust masculinity of British football culture. Chapter 4 offered an insight into the naturalised ascription of distinct hardy qualities to the Sikh men of the Punjab. The British army historically regarded Sikhs as a sturdy ‘martial’ race in both physical and psychological terms, traits they sought to utilise by enrolling large numbers of Punjabi-Sikhs into their ranks. We have also seen in Chapter 6 how the tournaments are opportunities for many Punjabi-Sikhs to eat and drink alcohol (often to excess) in the company of friends and family, in decidedly masculinised environs. The football clubs that Punjabi-Sikhs have established and play for revel in the very same non-sportive merriment that is often berated when indulged by white footballers. Drinking alcohol after matches or training, going out for a pint or two, socialising with other players is not an alien concept to all South Asian footballers. Some Muslim players may have religious objections to such indulgence. McDonald and Ugra’s (1998) report into discrimination in cricket does highlight some Muslim cricket teams’ refusal to partake of after-match socialising in club bars or pubs. This to some extent may also apply to Muslim football teams.

The absence of South Asian players from the game has to be set alongside the limited opportunities available to them. From the comparatively small number of South Asian players who have had trials, apprenticeships or even full-time contracts with professional clubs, the vast majority have reportedly encountered various obstacles that have hindered their advancement. Subjection to overt racist abuse from coaches,

players and spectators is a primary common denominator for many of these would-be footballers, whilst being made to feel isolated from the rest of the team or group is another shared experience that is effected through more subtle means, such as exclusion from after-training socialising and ritual young male bonding. Keaneston Rovers's Hardip told of one occasion when he accompanied a younger cousin to an apprenticeship trial at a local professional club:

My cousin's good, I mean he's good you know, he could play for a good club. But this time we went to this trial, he was playing ok but then he took the ball from this other white kid and made him look stupid man. I could see the coach saw the move and I thought he might be in, but then my cousin's kicking the shit out of this kid he just took the ball of and he was sent home. He told me afterwards that that kid called him a 'paki c*nt' and pulled his *paghta* (shortened turban/bandana) and he weren't taking that shit. apparently that white kid was the manager's son. (Hardip).

The *Asians Can't Play Football* report goes on to describe how this ostracization is compounded by many coaches' tangible indifference toward South Asian players, simply going through the motions of including them in training without providing the essential support, encouragement and constructive criticism that other white players received. Problematic cuisine is also cited as a detrimental aspect of South Asian culture that precludes the sporting success of the diverse members of that culture (ibid.).

With such fallacious conceptions of ethnicity and myopic visions of the future of British football, the defenders of the game's monolithic faith have clearly limited the 'pool of talent' that these shores have to call upon. Many club officials (coaches, scouts, managers, community officers) are guilty of illegitimately espousing the kudos of football's inherent 'colour blind' principal which allows for any (male) player to reach the highest levels of the sport regardless of colour, creed, religion or ethnic affiliation. This type of naïve, quixotic thinking is deemed to be substantiated by the disproportionately high numbers of black professional footballers. This argument denies the heterogeneity of Britain's various ethnic minority communities and the different histories, life experiences and points of exclusion that constitute their social, political and economic position in this country. Fleming (1995) states: "the experiences of racism in sport are experienced differently by different ethno-cultural groups, and they respond to it in different ways" (p.42), particularly pertinent when it serves to rationalise conventional abstract conjecture which holds aspirant South Asian footballers as subject to the same modes of discrimination and prejudice as the pioneer black players in British football (cf., Brown; 1972; Cashmore, 1982; Vasili, 1998). It also disclaims the massive discrimination that has, and persists in denying Britain's black population opportunities in other professional spheres and in education. In the same instance, the relative success of some South Asian groups in vocational fields such as the legal profession, medicine, the media, commerce and business, has been used against them as an indictment of their disinterest in sport and a more pressing motivation toward social and professional advancement (cf. *inter alia*, Robinson, 1990; Ballard, 1994; Fleming, 1995; Benson, 1996) (discussed further

in the Concluding Comments chapter). It must be noted that such relative social success is more apparent in South Asians of Indian descent as compared with the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, with the class locations of these groups impacting on any drive toward social mobility. This type of ethnic vocational stacking has been evident in schooling where African-Caribbean youngsters who show a particular aptitude and excellence in any sport are actively encouraged to pursue that sporting interest, often at the expense of their education. Conversely, South Asians have not been regarded by physical education teachers as possessing any great sporting or physical abilities and have instead received greater encouragement in matters more scholarly (Fleming 1995:38). There is a seemingly implicit understanding amongst many young British South Asians that they will not receive encouragement and guidance from schools in their hopes of pursuing sport at higher levels:

I've been playing (football) since I was thirteen, I mean playing properly in a team for my school and for Rovers. A few of us have, and I reckon I could've had a chance of getting somewhere but it just never came to anything like. I know Asian guys who were loads better than me and better than most of the white kids at school but they didn't even play in the school team. I remember Jonah (school team-mate) was put forward for the district once and he weren't even that good. I never even asked to go for the district team, no point really, nobody asked me. Nobody asked any of us. (Parm).

By adopting this kind of rationale and refusing to attend to the ambitions of the whole of the school population, P.E teachers have failed to recognise, nurture and promote the soccer talents of young aspiring South Asian football enthusiasts. They are

subsequently removed from, or denied access to, the progressive levels of competition and coaching that young white (and black) school-level players (a level that is still male dominated) enjoy. This order of exclusion is replicated and perpetuated through junior county football, amateur and non-League games, semi-professional football through to the privileged echelons of the full professional ranks.

Recent soccer history does offer a handful of names that signal a South Asian participation in top-flight football. Some of these names, in fact, reveal a greater truth about the society in which the game exists. Derby County Football Club have a gifted young South Asian, Punjabi-Sikh player, Amrick Sidhu, who is yet to fulfil the promise that pointed to him making a sustained impact on their first team. Another Punjabi-Sikh, Harpal Singh (born in the West Yorkshire town of Pudsey) remains in the reserve team of a Leeds United outfit which in 2001 had two first-team players involved in a court case relating to an alleged racial attack on a young British Pakistani student outside a Leeds nightclub (one player was acquitted; the other was charged with affray). Singh is another player that had been expected to breakthrough into the first team but is yet to figure in the starting eleven for the Elland Road club. Jas Jutla is another talented footballer of South Asian descent and again Punjabi-Sikh descent, plying his trade for Scottish League Division One outfit Greenock Morton, having been released by Glasgow Rangers (Bains and Johal, 1998). Naseem Bashir was briefly on the books of Reading Football Club in the late 1980s, but a regular

first team place was not forthcoming. Another Punjabi-Sikh youngster, Amritpal Singh, was signed by Millwall Football Club following an exhibition match between the London club and a *Khalsa* Football Federation 'All-Star XI' – a team made up of young Punjabi-Sikh players. In Amritpal's case, the young Punjabi lion is yet to figure in even the reserve team for the 'Lions' of London. The players who did manage to impose themselves upon first teams were Roy Smith who played for West Ham in the mid 1950s, Paul Wilson who played under Jock Stein at Glasgow Celtic and possibly the most famous footballer of South Asian descent, Ricky Heppolate, who played for Preston North End, Chesterfield, Orient, Peterborough United and Crystal Palace. The names of these three players betray their ethnic origin, moreover, their names disclose the extent to which their ethnicity, their South Asian heritage, has been compromised, indeed forsaken, during the course of their (and their families') respective quests for socio-cultural alignment. All three footballers are of mixed- race parentage, a syncretic proclivity that extends to more than one generation of their familial genealogies. Heppolate, as the most travelled and renowned of this trio, is a very apposite illustration of how football welcomes those who can fit into the accepted convention of what it is to be British and what it takes to be a footballer. He speaks no sub-continental language, only English nor he does he practice or adhere to any of the religions of that region. He was raised in a 'white' environment, with little South Asian influence and has "no emotional attachment to the country of his birth (India)" (Bains 1995:11 [parenthesis added]).

Heppolate's story bears remarkable similarity to that of Chris Dolby. Dolby was born to South Asian parents but adopted by white parents as a baby. Raised in Yorkshire in a mainly white domestic environment without the exertion of any aspect of any South Asian custom or tradition, Dolby went on to join first Rotherham, then Bradford as a professional footballer (ibid.). It was only the colour of his skin that lay superficial testament to his ethnic origin. When the most notable players to have made the grade in British professional football seem to share a common, distinct non-South Asian-ness, it seems to suggest that to become a footballer in Britain one does not necessarily have to be white, rather one must be seen as *being* white, and *being* British in a cultural, and thus a perceived ideological context.

7.2 BEYOND THE SPORTING STEREOTYPE

The standard stereotype of South Asian people is one of the submissive, naturally placid and physically frail individual. The effeminacy of such a stereotype is not incidental and is fully drawn out in the ostensible caricature of the exoticised, submissive, sexually elusive South Asian (young) woman (cf., Brah, 1996).³³ In footballing terms, South Asians have typically had to struggle to alleviate the

³³ Gilmore (1990) provides an overview of the different masculinities located in different countries and in different cultures. He looks at the historical precepts to the 'effeminising' and almost emasculating notion of the South Asian specifically Indian male. Commendably, Gilmore does not seek to generalise the Indian male population as one homogenous mass with shared histories and shared cultural traits that impact on their constructions and negotiations of masculinised identities. Gilmore recognises this heterogeneity as, "an intricate reflection of that nation's intricate mosaic of subcultures and religions, its regional and ethnic diversity, probably more varied than anywhere else in the world" (p.175).

ingrained notion that they possess no understanding or capability for the sport. This is in spite of the previously stated historical precedence that was set when a bare-footed Bengali Indian team defeated the British military's East Yorkshire regiment team by two goals to one in the final of the Shield competition (Mason, 1990). Unfortunately this sporting victory proved to be an isolated moment in Indian history and the image of a passionate footballing people never managed to transcend that moment, not even on the sub-continent itself. South Asians in Britain have had to fight for the right to be perceived as footballing protagonists:

...unlike their Afro-Caribbean counterparts, there was no evidence of Asian role models, no players of international repute whom white British people could identify with. Whilst Afro-Caribbean immigrants also encountered problems when playing in white football teams, they were undoubtedly assisted in their ability to converse in the same language, the wearing of similar clothes and the worshipping of the same nominal God (Bains and Johal 1998:51).

With the predominance of particular South Asian groups in certain regions of the British landscape, any all-South Asian football teams from that region will reflect the ethnic specificity of its South Asian populous. However, what unites these teams, more than a false notion of ethnic homogeneity is the common experience of racism, and a particular racism that is parasitically exacted through football. For South Asian football teams in Britain, racial abuse is not an uncommon violation. Individual accounts of such incidents are as alarmingly manifold as they are invidious. Football matches between all-South Asian teams and all-white teams are immanently infused with a confrontational charge. The volatility, indeed naked hostility of this charge, may be strategically played out underneath the game's open aggression.

combativeness and vigour (especially in British amateur leagues). On frequent occasion however, this legitimised bellicose veneer is penetrated to reveal an underlying order of blind hatred and ignorant fear. Whilst it would be foolish to suggest that every footballing clash between white and South Asian teams is nothing more than sublimated race war, competitive football has provided an arena in which the competitive interaction of an imperious 'host' community with a minoritised foreign 'other' can occur (Carrington, 1998a; Westwood, 1990). But this is not a fair competition. Football is an English sport given by this country to rest of the world' it is a part of the nation's fabric. For foreign groups entering this country, it is wrongly assumed that the game has to be an acquired passion and not a naturalised hereditary legacy, thus falsely asserting a controlling distance between non-indigenous British groups and football. This quasi-rationale is then used to place South Asians below the indigenous white community in terms of footballing acculturation and this is the same mode of (ir)rationalisation used by those who were happily oblivious to the irony of the rhetorical statement that 'Asians can't play football'.

This merry oblivion is also in evidence when real incidents of racial abuse during football matches involving South Asians are brought to light. It is still the common perception that racism in football is nothing more than a bit of harmless chanting or verbal 'stick' from the terraces. Actual accounts of physical threat dispel such naivete. Bains (1995) summarises the experience of racism that South Asian players have encountered and how they are reacting against such abuse:

Evidence of racism toward Asian players is still very apparent. Although two-thirds of Asian footballers claim to be subjected to regular forms of racism – an extraordinarily high level of abuse – what is most disturbing is the common perception amongst our respondents that referees and league management committees still offer them little or no protection. Over the years some Asian footballers have begun to change their image from being ‘soft-touches’ to people who can ‘look after themselves’...For the most part verbal abuse continues and it is up to the footballing authorities at local and national levels to stamp it out (p.27).

Racial abuse on the pitch during matches is a recurring phenomenon in the recounted local league footballing experiences of the Keaneston Rovers players too. This particular form of abuse ranges from verbal harassment through to physical attack.

Rovers’s defensive stalwart Manpal remembered one such notable incident:

we played this team from Radford a couple of years ago and it sort of kicked off after the final whistle. Some of their players had been giving it ‘paki’ this and ‘paki’ that, and really laid into Hardip because he always wears a kind of bandana thing on his head when playing. He wears a turban normally but he wears that bandana to play in. They were calling him ‘bandage head’ and kept pulling it off and stuff. Hardip just let it go, he’s used to it, most of us let it go, I mean you can’t lay into someone every time you get called a paki. But as their striker was running off the pitch, he ran past Hardip and spat on his head. Hardip felt it and ran after him and all of a sudden a load of their players were kicking the shit out of Hardip. So we all piled in and there was a bit of a ruck. The ref didn’t do anything because the game was over and he didn’t want to get involved anyway. We can handle ourselves, we’ve got some right nutters, and the other lot jacked it in when they knew that we weren’t backing down. (Manpal)

Such personalised, seemingly isolated incidents, and orally related accounts of racially motivated abuse suffered by British South Asians in amateur football are often overlooked when claims as to the inherent egalitarianism (or equalising forces) of sport are espoused (Jarvie, 1991b). South Asians in particular are viewed as being less affected/effected by racism and much less restricted by it, but as Fleming (1995) states, this type of reasoning is attributable to the lack of exposure that South Asians receive with regard to sport, and the general view of their disassociation with it: “[W]ith fewer South Asians involved in high-profile sport in Britain, there is considerably less evidence of racism directed towards, or experienced by them. Much of it is anecdotal, but no less valid for that” (p.44). It is the collective ‘value’ and weight of such seemingly isolated anecdotal accounts of racism that then serves to reflect the wider existence of a more general negative phenomenon:

when a substantial body of isolated bits of evidence... is built up, the issue ceases to be of existence only to the individuals concerned, it becomes a much broader issue; and one for which the ‘sociological imagination’, emphasising the links between individual ills and public issues, provides an important conceptual framework (p.49).

Attempts by South Asian players to join white teams at local league level have been met with various forms of resistance. Such opposition from some white teams has taken the more obvious form of racially motivated hostile exclusion, and also a more tacit, non-welcoming exclusionary policy. A cautious, occasionally deliberate reticence on the behalf of some South Asian players in itself has served to maintain a distance between certain South Asian footballers and white teams. The racist

tendencies of particular members of a club/team can influence the overall composition of the team and its strategy in terms of using/accepting various players. The more powerful and influential such members are, the greater control they will have over team personnel. It must be stressed that not all white teams and players can be marked as racist by particular experiences pronounced by non-white players/teams. White teams and communities are also diverse and may include individuals who are distinctly anti-racist or who do not subscribe to more overtly racist sentiments. Just as it is vital to avoid falsely universalising the South Asian population, the same critical recognition must be afforded to the white population. Those South Asian players accepted by team-mates as part of the mostly white team, then have to contend with being in the minority giving some opposition players greater license to subject them to the full torrent of ignorant abuse. All-South Asian teams constitute more than just a bunch of lads starting their own football team. Such teams represent safe, de-pressurised sites that allow South Asians to play the game and also proffer the opportunity to effect positive interaction with non-South Asian teams in a competitive environment. The *Shaheedi* Games tournaments are perhaps the apex of such ethnic sporting solidarity, a solidarity largely exercised by and for British Punjabi-Sikhs. The expansion of the football competition within the tournaments, and the still-growing number of Punjabi-Sikh teams (of varying ages) now guarantees the annual staging of ten *Shaheedi* Games football tournaments organised by the *Khalsa* Football Federation in conjunction with local Sikh *Gurdwaras*. These football tournaments take place in Birmingham, Coventry, Bradford, Barking, Leamington Spa, Gravesend, Derby, Reading, Slough and

Wolverhampton. Up to a thousand adult and youth footballers can be involved during a single event. Despite this vast array of footballing talent on display, the tournaments have failed to attract the attention of professional football club representatives. There are three perceptible reasons for such oversight: first, the tournaments receive minimal advertisement outside the confines of South Asian communities (variously predominated by Punjabi-Sikhs but not always of Punjabi-Sikh majority); second, club scouts state the problems of assessing relative abilities of players in an environment where overall standards are difficult to gauge. They also argue that most of the better players are too old to be seriously considered by professional clubs. Third, South Asians in Britain are still perceived as being an insular community and the idea of all-South Asian tournaments seemingly reiterates such a view. South Asian footballers are therefore regarded as being happier and more comfortable playing in their 'own' company. The exclusivity of the Asian Games is used as further 'proof' of this line of argument. However:

...such a position overlooks the specific history and social and cultural context of these tournaments. What it also does is to ignore the obvious enthusiasm of the players who play in mainstream football as well as the Asian Games. Indeed, it speaks volumes for these players' love of the game that they are prepared to play all year round, year after year. It's an enthusiasm for football that one would struggle to find in other communities (Bains and Johal, 1998:57)

There is an almost machiavellian tautology that operates whereby South Asians are forced into creating their own mono-ethnic football teams in order to protect themselves from racial abuse and still partake of the sport. The abject and ignorant

refusal of British football's gate-keeping bodies to effect positive access for South Asians into the game gives further impetus to their enforced mobilisation. Once football-hungry South Asians, particularly Punjabi-Sikhs, established their own association with the sport in this country, their ingenuity, enterprise and their obvious passion for football is then used as an illicit pretext to wantonly espouse notions of generalised South Asian insularity and impenetrability. With the governing authorities of football opening their eyes and minds to a hitherto (for them) clandestine soccer culture, South Asian footballers' contribution to the various levels of British football must receive due recognition and reward. The Football Association's 'Working Party on Asians in Football' is placing a formal concentration on developing measures to tap into and encourage the South Asian footballing population. Professional clubs are attempting to establish more effective 'Football in the Community' programmes that reach all sections of local communities by developing closer links and more specialised schemes. Leicester City Football Club, Sheffield United and West Ham United are amongst the more prominent clubs that have specifically geared 'Football in the Community' schemes that are targeted at local South Asians. Gordon Taylor, Chief Executive of the Professional Footballers Association has stated that with clubs spending millions in the transfer market, "what we need to do is to plough some of that money back through 'Football in the Community' schemes and target it towards developing Asian (sic) football". (quoted in Bains and Johal, 1998:II). Whilst this belated recognition of a South Asian footballing passion and penchant is undoubtedly encouraging, the specific schemes that attempt to develop South Asian football talent must not fail to recognise all such

players no matter what their abilities and relative merits may be. There will be an elite of South Asian players who possess the required abilities to succeed in the professional game, but, as with the rest of the population, there are many more South Asian football enthusiasts who play and enjoy football without being necessarily equipped to make the professional grade. Football scouts, ranging from non-league and professional clubs, have a reduced inclination to dismiss South Asian players. teams, games and tournaments in favour of promoting ‘home-grown’ talent, in the face of growing foreign influence in British teams and the under-achievement of the national team. But any such pursuit of selecting, developing and harnessing elite talent, particularly with regard to South Asian players, must maintain an informed commitment to those who play football without a view to professionalism, indeed, those who represent the footballing majority.

7.3 FOOTBALL FANDOM – TELEVISION, TERRACES AND BEYOND³⁴

Not every sports enthusiast is an active, athletic and avid participator in the physical enactment of the sports themselves. In the case of football, there are more people who follow the game as fans and supporters than there are those who actively take part in regular football matches. Indeed, it is widely recognised that in terms of actual participation, angling is Britain’s most popular ‘sport’, although the real sportive

³⁴ This sub-chapter heading is borrowed from Bains and Johal (1998) *Corner Flags and Corner Shops – The South Asian Football Experience*.

merits of fishing are openly debatable. Similarly in the British Punjabi-Sikh community those who enjoy, follow and partake of football without actually regularly playing it, significantly outnumber those who do actually don boots, shorts and jerseys and take to grassy fields in competitive (or 'friendly') participation. During the 2000 *Shaheedi* Games in Birmingham, there were 46 Punjabi-Sikh football teams, many with more than one team in the tournament competing in one of four senior divisions, as well as the over-35's, the under-16's and the under-12's.³⁵ The number of teams and the number of players however, were still considerably less than the number of footballing aficionados who attended the Games as non-playing fans and spectators, who were estimated to be in the region of 11,000 over the course of the tournament weekend.³⁶ For the majority of young British Punjabi-Sikhs who do not necessarily play football on a regular or organised basis, as well as for those who do, supporting particular English clubs is an attachment that is undertaken with no less fervour than their white counterparts and is just as 'active' and as committed an association with football as playing the game itself.

Recent studies of South Asians and football have shown that young South Asians in Britain have a multifarious association/engagement with the sport. Indeed, having been heavily involved in the organisation and conduct of these studies, I was not surprised by findings that suggested that playing football was not the most immediate

³⁵ See Appendix for full list of teams competing in 2000 *Shaheedi* Games in Birmingham.

and important means of engaging with the sport for British South Asians. Whilst football remains a very popular physical recreation activity (participated in at varying levels), following, supporting, being a fan of particular clubs was most often the leading form of interaction/attachment between this ethnic minority and the game of football.³⁷ The reasons for particular football supporters enter a contract of allegiance to certain football clubs have received minimal scholastic study. Curren and Redmond's (1991) survey of readers of the football magazine *When Saturday Comes* is one of the very few such studies. Their report highlighted how supporters of lower division clubs (those clubs outside of the Premier League) lived in or around the vicinity of the football they supported, with over half the supporters of the bigger clubs (the authors comprised a 'Big 5' consisting of Manchester United, Liverpool, Everton, Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur) located outside the club's region, indeed, often in a different part of the country altogether. This is a phenomenon that is replicated in the Punjabi-Sikh footballing collective, as well as for the wider band of British South Asian football fans. Specifically, "Manchester United and Liverpool are far and away the two most widely supported, followed, and recognised clubs amongst the Asian [sic] community" (Bains and Johal, 1998:118). Research carried out amongst young South Asians in Leicester, Bradford and in the east-end of London provides further verification of the popularity of these two particular clubs.³⁸ From my own experiences of playing football amongst other Punjabi-Sikhs, and from conversations in various pubs around this country, I have witnessed numerous heated

³⁶ This figure was supplied by the tournament organisers from the Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* Shelby.

³⁷ See Football Task Force (1998) *Eliminating Racism from Football* and Bains et al. (1998) *Young People and Football in East London*.

³⁸ See previous footnote.

debates as to the respective merits (and inadequacies) of these two Lancashire teams between groups of Punjabi-Sikhs divided schismatically by their being either Manchester United or Liverpool fans. The players of Keaneston Rovers Football Club provide particularly illuminating vessels that personify the dynamics and effects of football fandom. Whilst there is a small minority of players who support teams such as Arsenal, Chelsea and even Leeds United, the majority can be split into camps whose loyalties lie with either Manchester United, Liverpool or the hometown club of Coventry City. Veteran goalkeeper and now junior team coach Balbir explained his devotion to Coventry City in the following way:

these kids are just stupid, they just support any team that wins things. I've always supported City and we've only ever won one FA Cup. I came here in 1969. I was only a kid and I never even went to school here, I got a job as soon as I could. I grew up in Coventry and my family's lived here for years now. Coventry's our home town, we should support our home town team. (Balbir).

Balbir's attachment to and support of the representative team of his 'adopted' home town (Coventry City), is very much in keeping with a traditional framework of English club football support with the emphasis on a sense of locality and familial unity concretising such a tradition (Curren and Redmond, 1991). For the older club members of Rovers, those who emigrated from India to Britain as young men or adolescents, there is not only an evident attachment to the city in which their families established new homes, and where jobs were acquired and new lives ordered, but also, a clear and expressed identification with, and support of, the football team that represents the city. The *kabaddi* teams that represent different cities and towns in this

country where a significant Punjabi-Sikh community might be resident also offer sportive vessels of local identification for older members of this community. As explored in Chapter 6 these teams (often patronised by local Punjabi-Sikh businessmen) assumed role of totems of honour amongst sporting Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain, conferring the town/city that was successful in tournaments with perceived glory much as they did in the Punjab. Balbir's support of Coventry City FC was not the result of an inherited familial legacy that had been actively passed down and passively received. As a young man Balbir was not taken to Highfield Road (the home ground of Coventry City), nor to any other football ground by his father or an older relative. The very act of attending a football match was something quite alien to the majority of pioneer Punjabi-Sikh immigrants. The blanket whiteness of the 'face' of football crowds in stadia around the country were testament to football being a bastion of (white) Englishness that could not be penetrated in a similar manner as the shop-floor industry, localised industrial residential areas and parts of the public services (such as transport) had been. Football outwardly projected itself as the white Englishman's game. With an existing experience/understanding of the game that accompanied his relocation to these shores, an increased exposure to the impassioned cauldron of British football lit the blue touch paper of Balbir's nascent footballing fervour. With City being the only professional club in Coventry, Highfield Road became the locus and focus of his fandom:

my father hated football. He didn't like sport much really anyway. I went to see City when I was about 23 or 24. I went with my brother-in-law and his brother. We didn't really know the players names but we knew they were playing for Coventry, we knew what colour shirts Coventry had. We heard the crowd shout and

cheer and we never saw anything like that before. We started going every now and again when we weren't working or had enough money. My dad never understood why we liked City or why we went. He never even came to watch me play for Rovers through all those years and Rovers's a Punjabi club. Now I look out for how City are doing wherever I am or whatever I'm doing. They're my team, my town you know. (Balbir)

Balbir's association with the football club and the region in which he lives and in which he has an historical sense of 'home' is similar to the majority of local team supporters in Britain (Brown, 1998). For early Punjabi-Sikh settlers in this country, accessing the professional footballing product was most efficaciously and immediately achieved by attending the live matches at the grounds of the clubs that were most local to where they lived. It was not so much a football club or team that they were buying into, or rather, giving of themselves and receiving pleasure/misery from, but moreover the game of football itself. They first sought to partake of football as admirers and fans of the game. The medium for such interaction and association was their nearest footballing venue - the most immediate site of professional football, where the game was played and competition was intense, where the titles at stake were historically rich and the act of support was fervently concentrated and enshrined. The attachment to the club, in this instance to Coventry City Football Club, was a natural extension to Punjabi-Sikh immigrants support of the game:

We'd finish our shifts at one o'clock on Saturday afternoon and go to the local pub for a couple of pints and then go off to Highfield Road to watch Coventry City. In those days Coventry were in the old Third Division and had players like George Curtis and Reg Matthews playing for them. City used to play in crowds

of around 5,000. Most weeks there were a hundred or so Asians [sic] at the game, sometimes a few more. You see, in those days, we Indians had very little else to entertain ourselves, so that is why so many of us enjoyed going to the football matches. We would never get any trouble from the crowd. There were some who did not follow the game, so they just used to talk to each other instead of watching the football... you see, back then, there were few places where we could get together in large numbers and just talk. Over the years fewer of us carried on going to the football, but some did carry on (quoted in Bains and Johal, 1998:111-112).

This reminiscential tale of immigrant Punjabi-Sikhs gathered on the terraces of Highfield Road, busily chattering away amongst the crowd of seasoned soccer supporters, as two professional football teams competed fervently for three league points, seems to contradict the more contemporaneous moves that have seen Punjabi-Sikhs, indeed, South Asians (and other ethnic minority groups) resisting attendance at football grounds to see live matches. This emerging proclivity to stay away from the sites of 'real' soccer support, that is, from attending live matches at the football grounds themselves, has been due to specific changes in the nature of the way football is supported and the changes in the body of the supporters themselves. These, in turn, have had a profound impact on the manner in which ethnic minorities formulate, govern and enact their own modes of club football support.

The majority of the Keaneston Rovers players (aside from the staunch Coventry City supporters) can be divided into two factions of club footballing fandom. Similar to the wider band of British South Asian soccer supporters, the Punjabi-Sikhs of Keaneston Rovers affiliate themselves and locate their fandom with either Manchester United or Liverpool football clubs. While both teams enjoy an elevated position as two of the foremost successful, glamorous and famous clubs in the land, the Punjabi-Sikh attachment to them is not merely the formulated along these axes: the cliché of ‘everybody wanting to know a winner’ is too reductive and simplistic a notion to explain away the Punjabi-Sikh support for these two English footballing giants. With the cities of Manchester and Liverpool not noted for a particularly sizeable Punjabi-Sikh, or even South Asian presence, the teams representing those cities have a significant South Asian support base that resides outside of the city limits. Keaneston Rovers defender (and manager of the social/leisure club where the players meet to train, play matches and drink beer) Saroop, spoke of how he became a staunch Manchester United fan:

I was never taken to a United game by anyone. My dad’s quite into football, he’s helped Rovers out for a long time now and he comes and supports us at the tournaments and when we play at home here [at the leisure centre playing field], but he doesn’t support United. If anything he’ll look out for City’s results [Coventry]. I started supporting them about twenty-odd years ago when ‘Big Ron’ was manager and Robson and Whiteside and Wilkins and those players were around. We won the FA Cup in ’83 and ’85 and Old Trafford was always packed. I just loved them from then. Yeah, they were on TV quite a lot and their matches were shown even though we didn’t really win much. We came close to winning the league a couple of times but everyone always knew that Liverpool were gonna win it. I hate to admit it but I never really

thought we were good enough to beat Liverpool back then. (Saroop)

Saroop never went to Old Trafford to watch Manchester United ‘live’. His initial contact with United, contact that was similarly sustained, was distinctly televisual. He admitted to the successes of FA Cup victories as enhancing his support of Manchester United, but he did not concede that it was television exposure alone that forged the strength of his support for the Old Trafford club:

United weren’t the only team on the telly, Liverpool were on the box as much, probably more. Arsenal, Spurs, Villa, I mean, Villa won the European Cup when United were still crap, so it wasn’t just them that were given the most coverage. There was a lot of stuff about United in magazines and stuff, but there was something else about them, I can’t really say what it is. There’s all that Munich business and the Busby babes, I don’t know, United just seem to be a club for anyone. You don’t have to come from Manchester to be a United fan. (Saroop)

The airplane accident that occurred on the runway of Munich airport in February 1958 claimed the lives of eight young Manchester United players who were part of a team admiringly known as ‘the Busby Babes’ (homage to the venerable manager Matt Busby) (Nawrat and Hutchings, 1996). In Britain at that time, this catastrophe was not lost on the newly-established immigrant communities, as even those who knew little or nothing about football, the universal language of unjust tragedy was readily understood. Hence for some Punjabi-Sikh immigrants, the name of Manchester United was amongst their first interactions with the game of football. United won the

league title three times in the decade of the 1950s and with the world class triumvirate of Bobby Charlton, Denis Law and George Best, Manchester United became the first English team to win the European Cup in 1968, ten years after the Munich disaster. The unprecedented success achieved by Sir Alex Ferguson in his reign as manager of Manchester United since 1986 to the present has further increased the club's global image and a type of, "glamorous universalism that [is] inextricably linked to the psychological and emotional effects of the 1958 Munich air crash tragedy" (Bains and Johal, 1998:119). This unfortunate legacy has given the club that global image and has forged a unique place for them in the minds of followers of football around the world (the Hillsborough tragedy in which 95 Liverpool supporters died after being crushed at the 1989 FA Cup semi-final is another tragic event that is inscribed into the lives of all football fans). The promise of glamour, the allure of lavish amounts of money spent by various managers in the quest for triumphant glory and the expectations engendered by the country's biggest supported club, as well as its proliferation on television screens, in magazines, newspapers and in the language of football-talk in pubs and clubs around the country, has secured Manchester United a central place in the world of football. This high- level exposure has been projected onto British Punjabi-Sikhs, particularly the nominal 'second generation' for whom footballing fandom is not necessarily and crucially plotted along the lines of local loyalty or familial tradition. This is a sentiment that was given experiential resonance by Keaneston Rovers's centre-half Hardip:

no member of my family supports United. My dad doesn't watch football, he's more into *kabaddi* or hockey. My brother's a Liverpool fan, but I'm the only one who supports United. We used to be well bad in the

'80s. Shit players like Terry Gibson and Peter Davenport and that lot, no man, they weren't good. I still supported them though, it doesn't matter if your team's crap or if they don't win, once you start supporting them you stick with it. I've been watching them on telly since I was about ten years old, even back in the '70s. Yeah, they were on telly quite a lot and because there was always you know, a big fuss made around them, you start to recognise the players and you know more about them because they're more famous. Coventry didn't really have any big name players or any kind of glamour, and so you go with what you see the most. (Hardip)

Success has not been the primary luring factor for so many Punjabi-Sikhs affiliating themselves with Manchester United Football Club. Indeed, as Hardip points out, until the 1990s, United struggled to alleviate themselves from the cesspit of mediocrity and under-achievement that belied their position as the nation's most popular and glamorous club. There is also little by way of local pride that supporting a football team can engender (Curren and Redmond, 1991). The Rovers players were all either born in Coventry or have lived there since their families relocated to Britain. Not supporting Coventry City as their first choice team, and placing a team from Manchester, a city located a hundred miles away, is not necessarily a denigration of their home town, or a display of disloyalty, disassociation or indifference toward Coventry. The concomitant identification with the home town of Coventry (and with Coventry's football team) shall be discussed shortly, but it seems only right (and fair) that the Punjabi-Sikh support of Britain's other great club footballing institution, Liverpool Football Club, also be given due exploration.

It was in the decade of the 1970s that Liverpool crystallised their identity as the *tour de force* of the English national game by winning five league championships. The legendary ‘boot-room’ spawned managers such as Joe Fagan, the magical player-manager Kenny Dalglish and the most successful of all, Bob Paisley. Liverpool won another six league titles in the 1980s including two FA Cups and four League Cups. It was however, the four European Champions Cup triumphs that elevated Liverpool to the pinnacle of British football and led them to be celebrated as one of the finest teams on the continent. The scale of Liverpool’s success brought with it mass exposure on television, in football magazines and newspapers, and it also brought fame, notoriety and celebrity for the players who achieved it. With media saturation of this type, Liverpool FC was taken, *en masse*, into the hearts and minds of many football-loving British Punjabi-Sikhs. Keaneston Rovers’s centre-forward Ajinder, was one such Liverpool devotee:

when I was a kid Liverpool were easily the best team around. We won everything, and if we didn’t win, we were favourites. My uncle, he’s only about ten years older than me, he used to talk about the old seventies team with Keegan and Toshack and that lot, but I grew up with Dalglish and Souness and Rush. You just knew they were the best, there weren’t no point watching football unless you were watching Liverpool. I’ve been watching them ever since. (Ajinder)

Success, fame, glamour and media saturation combined to make Manchester United and Liverpool the two most popularly supported football clubs amongst soccer-mad British Punjabi-Sikhs, indeed, for the wider British South Asian community. This

legacy of support for these two clubs is continued by younger Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain whose attachment to them owes no small amount to the influence of older relatives (brothers, cousins, uncles and fathers, as well as sisters and aunts) whispering coercive instructions into the ear of fledgling fandom, but also, significantly, to the rise and rise of televised football.

The symbiotic relationship between sport and television began to assume a clear and dynamic function in the 1950s with sports sponsorship emerging to become a dominant force, as well as a gelling agent that also served to (symbolically) consummate the marriage between television and sport (Whannel, 1986:132). For McCormack (1984), the next decade was even more important. He observed that, “[I]n the 1960s an unholy alliance was developing. Sport was helping to make television and television was helping to make sport” (p.23). Williams (1994a) notes how television was used to guard those sports that the British government considered to be “the property of the nation” (p.383), particularly sporting events such as the Wimbledon tennis championships, the Grand National, the FA Cup final and the Oxford and Cambridge University boat race, amongst others. The emergence of satellite television at the beginning of the 1990s signalled the end of televised sport funded through the television licenses or through the advertising generated by TV exposure. Satellite television would work on a pay-to-view basis with sport spearheading the push to ingratiate and promote this new form of televisual

entertainment. In 1992, English club football underwent a major transformation that tightened the alliance between football and satellite television:

the English FA and [Rupert] Murdoch's BSkyB satellite sports channel, Sky Sports, announced a groundbreaking TV deal that gave the Murdoch channel exclusive rights to live coverage of English football's newly established FA Premier League, a breakaway league made up of 22 of England's strongest and most wealthy soccer clubs (ibid.).

For Punjabi-Sikhs and other South Asians in Britain, sport was not the only form of entertainment that encapsulated the allure of satellite television. BSkyB also offered *Zee TV*, a comprehensive 'Asian channel' that beamed dramas, soap operas, comedy shows, music features, live sports (predominantly cricket) and daily news programmes from the Indian subcontinent directly into the homes of South Asians in Britain. For the first time since South Asians had settled in this country, they were offered televisual entertainment of a type and on a level that they had never before witnessed.³⁹ With subscription to *Zee TV* relatively inexpensive (a complete and varied dedicated daily South Asian channel was available for a monthly fee that was the equivalent of renting three Bollywood Indian films, three times a week), the British South Asian uptake of satellite television was unsurprisingly large. Allied with the *en masse* South Asian subscription to *Zee TV* was the concomitant subscription to

³⁹ Programmes for South Asian immigrants did exist even as early as the late 1960s, but programmes such as *The Asian Programme* were transmitted only once a week early on Sunday mornings. Such shows consisted initially of helpful advice for immigrant South Asian communities to adjust to a new cultural climate, but then proceeded to become more entertainment-based instead of educational/informative with music and celebrity guests from the subcontinent. More recent programmes such as *Network East* are made specifically with a younger British South Asian audience in mind and again are only afforded irregular 'seasons' of broadcast. See Johal, S. (1996) *Bollywood in Britain – A Foreign Cinema in a Foreign Land*.

Sky Sports, a purchase that was founded on the promise of receiving access to Premier League football. GNG Shelby's Tony, explained how these two channels gratified the entertainment needs of South Asian, specifically Punjabi-Sikh, households:

we had *Zee TV* right from the start. It's good for everybody you know. My wife watches the dramas and my dad watches the news. my daughters love Indian films and all the Hindi film songs are always on and they show new films and old films. All the Indian and Pakistan cricket games are shown live. Most of the time they are at funny times so we don't see them. Because we had satellite anyway we got *Sky Sports* for the football as well. Me and Sucha, my son, both love football and it doesn't really cost that much, so we have all the Indian stuff for everybody and we have football as well, I can watch Albion and Liverpool so everybody's happy. (Tony)

From my own experiences of talking to Punjabi-Sikhs around the country (through informal personal and familial ties as well as through research endeavours) the dual subscription to a dedicated, specialised South Asian channel (*Zee TV*) and to the specialist sports channel (*Sky Sports*), was a common occurrence in many Punjabi-Sikh households.

With the digital revolution increasing the scope of television to provide the most dynamic coverage of the footballing spectacle, the ability to support one's favoured team from the confines and comforts of one's own home is readily taken up by

Britain's Punjabi-Sikh football fans. It is not an objective of this study to explore the dynamics of the relationship between the sports fan and television (as the mediator of any given sport or sports event). Studies that do pertain to investigate this and fandom are predominantly the works of American scholars who have tended to concentrate on globally televised sporting events such as the Olympic Games, the soccer World Cup and (specific to North Americans) the Super Bowl (c.f. *inter alia* Duncan and Brummett, 1989; Whannel, 1992; Eastman and Riggs, 1994; Gantz and Wenner, 1995; Rose and Friedman, 1997). The more intrinsically operative concern here is how Punjabi-Sikh football fans in Britain have located the method of their support for their clubs not necessarily or crucially in their attendance at their club's matches, but instead arrange for themselves an intimate attachment to their club that is mutually maintained via television.

Having outlined just how ardently many Punjabi-Sikhs support Liverpool and Manchester United, cold statistics show that only 2% of United's season ticket holders are of non-white/European backgrounds and Liverpool could only boast 0.6% non-white season ticket holding fan base.⁴⁰ The *FA Premier League National Fans Survey* authors did indicate that Manchester United's relative high level of ethnic minority support reflected on "that club's attraction to Asian [sic] spectators" (Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, 2000:6). However, there are

⁴⁰ Figures taken from the FA Premier League National Fans Survey 1999/2000. Since the inception of the survey in 1993, the number of ethnic minority fans that have been recorded as attending live

overriding reasons that lie behind the reticence of ethnic minority supporters from visiting football stadia and watching live football matches and supporting ‘their’ teams in person. The continued scourge of racism (perceived and actual) persists in deterring Punjabi-Sikhs and other ethnic minorities from attending football grounds. One Keanestone Rovers player offered the following anecdote as evidence of the latent threat the possibility of racial abuse holds:

I know this Singh (turbanned Punjabi-Sikh) right who went to see Man U play City (Coventry), he don’t like either of them really but he went with some mates just coz it was a big team playing here. Anyway, he never got to see the game or anything anyway because before him and his mates got chased by some NF (National Front members) or some fuckers like that, and they pulled his *pagh* (turban) off and started kicking it about. He hasn’t been to a match since. (Gurnam).

This is by no means an isolated example of such intimidation and actual physical abuse by a minority section of white football ‘supporters’ against ethnic minority fans. Veteran GNG Shelby player Tony had been a staunch West Bromwich Albion supporter since he arrived in this country as a teenager. His earliest recollections of going to The Hawthorns (West Bromwich’s home ground) were tinged with a cacophonous fusion of nostalgia and disdain:

Albion are my club you know. I went there when no Indians were going there. Me and Maan used to go. No work on Saturdays you know and I didn’t have to work in the shop. Albion were good then, the best. Good players like Regis, but there were some arseholes there as well you know. We knew some of them. I worked

football matches has never exceeded 1% of the overall match attendance across the Premier League clubs.

with this guy who used to shout at the blacks when they had the ball and he used to try and beat us as well. I remember those arseholes. I told you. I started learning *karate* and so they stopped coming by us to start trouble when we beat them a few times. (Tony).

Back et al. (2001) have described how, “football makes available a means for expressing the boundaries of inclusion, exclusiveness, xenophobia and racism” (p.83). It has not just been the experienced reality of such racism that has resolved many ethnic minority football fans to staying away from grounds. it is also the popular dissemination of the substantiated urban rule that football stadia are legitimate arenas for the manifold expressions of racism. One young Punjabi-Sikh football fan who had never been to watch his favourite team play in a live match offered his views:

you here from others about skinheads and that at grounds. I don't go so I don't know for myself, but I don't want to go in case I do get some, you know, trouble. It aint worth it. It just aint worth going somewhere where you might get that kind of shit. (Amarpreet).

The *Eliminating Racism From Football* (1998) report was unhesitating in its statement of the prevalence of racial abuse in the playing and spectating spheres of the game, claiming that, “black and Asian (sic) players in England still encounter unacceptable levles of racist abuse on and off the pitch” (p.1). Even white supporters who attend matches are aware of racial abuse (directed mostly at black players but also at the few ethnic minority supporters) that exists in football grounds, even citing

it as a reason why so few ethnic minorities are visible in stadia (Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, 2000).

Skellington (1996) has little doubt as to why ethnic minorities are so poorly represented in soccer grounds around the country. He categorically states that, “[R]acial abuse and violence remain a cancer in the game and are important reasons why so few black and Asian [sic] spectators watch British football at top level” (p.242). The scourge of football hooliganism has been afforded detailed critical enquiry from sociologists in particular (c.f. *inter alia*, Walvin, 1986; Dunning et al., 1988; Williams et al., 1989; Redhead, 1991; Williams, 1992). The association of fascist nationalist organisations such as the National Front with football hooliganism meant that, “racism on the football terraces and in the stands [was] rather more overt and, for most people, easier to identify than the semi-institutional forms which tend to characterise professional football culture” (Williams, 1992:3). Football grounds became recruiting grounds for such nationalist groups and were used as sites of dissemination to spread the propaganda of race hate in Britain (Back et al., 1998). If football grounds are widely recognised as “one of the largest public arenas in which racism can be openly expressed” (p.71), then there is little wonder as to why ethnic minority groups are deterred from attending such venues. The fear of verbal and physical abuse has been the primary instructive/instrumental agent in stopping black and South Asian football fans from going along to football grounds to support their

favoured teams. Anti-racism initiatives such as the *Let's Kick Racism Out of Football* (abbreviated to *Kick It Out*) campaign have addressed the near endemic problem of football-related racism and have initiated a number of schemes and measures to combat racism within the game. The *Kick It Out* campaign receives its backing from the Commission for Racial Equality and The Football Trust, who with support from the Football Association and the professional football clubs themselves continue to work towards the eradication of the most insidious form of bigotry, discrimination, abusive intolerance and injustice from British football (Holland, 1995; Garland and Rowe, 1999). With many football clubs harbouring (and seemingly tolerating) the support of fans (albeit a minority) who maintain distinct racially intolerant ideologies, and when the shouting of racially abusive/offensive chants can be heard from the terraces/stands/seats of even top-flight Premier League clubs, how are Punjabi-Sikh soccer fans able to not only support the game itself, but also the particular teams to whom such racist supporter elements are attached? Liverpool fan, Ajinder put forward one line of reasoning:

I've only been to Anfield a few times. I go to the European games if anything, you know, UEFA Cup matches or something, I wouldn't bother going to normal league games, I've had a bit of trouble before and it just isn't worth it. There's always a few dickheads who want to call you 'paki' and tell you to go back to your own country, but you kind of expect it so it doesn't really bother me much. It's worse when you get chased by a load of them and you know if you get caught you're gonna get the shit kicked out of you. I still support Liverpool though, some idiots aren't going to change that. Just because they're racist, it doesn't mean that the players are or that the club is. (Ajinder)

There seems to exist a particular personal identification with the club and the team as individuals, as opposed to the collective of the mass of Liverpool supporters gathered within Anfield football stadium, and the racist minority within that collective. In this way there is a more limited sense of Anderson's 'imagined community' (1983), whereby Punjabi-Sikhs supporters such as Ajinder, do not 'imagine' themselves as unconditionally and unreservedly part of the 'community' of Liverpool fans congregated within the stadia, or necessarily outside of it. There is no reduction in the vehemence of the support that Punjabi-Sikhs seemingly harbour for particular football clubs despite often experiencing racist abuse whilst engaged in the most immediate act of support within the confines of the club's 'home'. The infrequency and/or rarity of visits to the actual football grounds do not lessen the strength and passion with which the club is supported, and has no loosening effect on the attachment to the club. Again Ajinder provided illustrative experience of this tendency:

if I go to the games or watch Liverpool on T.V it's all the same to me. I don't care if people call me an 'armchair supporter' - that's their business. I know I'm a Liverpool supporter, I know how much I love the team. I know all about the history of the club, I know the former players and that, you know, and all about what we've won and who scored when. If anyone asked me anything about Liverpool, I'd probably know the answer. If you get a bit of stick from other idiots at a game, it does spoil your enjoyment of the match, if you're there, it makes you a bit scared because you know, there's loads of them and only usually me and my brother. But that doesn't change my mind about Liverpool. If I'm watching them at home or in the pub on telly, I'm still supporting them, I'm still a Liverpool supporter. (Ajinder)

This viewpoint, one that promotes the shared knowledge in the history of the club was also noted amongst other fans of the so-called 'Big 5' clubs by Curren and Redmond in their 1991 study of football supporters. Amongst the players of Keaneston Rovers FC are a number of younger Punjabi-Sikh football fans who are as equally committed supporters of Liverpool, but mostly of Manchester United. The resurgence of United as the foremost imperious footballing force in the 1990s, during which period they have dominated the domestic game and also achieved the club footballing apex of winning the European Champions Cup (including a historic league, FA Cup and European Cup in 1999), has (not entirely un-coincidentally) coincided with their leading the way in the new commercialisation of British club football.⁴¹ Young Rovers centre-forward Amarpreet is one of the new breed of Manchester United fans who has only experienced success whilst supporting the team and whose footballing acculturation has been marked by the forces of extensive club marketing and merchandising, annual European competition and big-money signings of top-class players. Amarpreet, like so many boys and men in Britain (and in parts of Europe) has wholly bought into the hyperreal brand that now is 'Manchester United', with bedroom walls covered full of posters, numerous replica kits and videos of the clubs greatest moments (almost entirely from the last decade). Yet, Amarpreet, does not partake of the central feature of support that traditionally has bound the club and the supporter in an intimate dyad. Despite never having attending a live match at Old Trafford, Amarpreet had no hesitation in defending his allegiance to the team:

⁴¹ See King, A. (1997) *New Directors, Customers and Fans: The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s*, and Lee, S. (1998) *Grey Shirts to Grey Suits: The Political Economy of English Football in the 1990s*.

I don't need to go to Old Trafford. I can watch United on *Sky*. We've got cable T.V at home so I get MUTV as well so I can watch them anytime, really. Some people call me 'glory boy' and say stuff like I only support United because they win things. But when I was a kid, I knew other people, like my cousins who were United fans, and most of the Rovers players were. and I never saw much of Coventry (City) but I saw United win the FA Cup in 1990 when we beat Crystal Palace in the replay, and I've supported them since then. I don't think it matters how you start supporting a team, I just think that once you've started supporting them then that's it, you can't support anyone else, you either get really into them or you don't. I'm really into United, I could never think of supporting anyone else. (Amarpreet)

On being made aware of the racism that occurs at football grounds, even at clubs such as Manchester United, with its much cherished/propounded cosmopolitan and universal appeal/image, Amarpreet revealed an illuminating perspective:

because I've never been to Old Trafford, I've never heard anything racist. If I'm not there, if I'm not in the stadium when someone's calling Andy Cole or someone a 'nigger' or a 'black bastard' or something, or calling me a 'dirty paki' or something like that, then for me, United isn't a racist club, Old Trafford isn't a racist place. It's because I don't go to Old Trafford in person to support United, that I can support them fully without seeing the racism for myself. I don't live in Manchester. I haven't even been to Manchester so I couldn't say if it's a racist place or not. I live in Coventry and you get racism quite a lot in some parts here, and I know some people, other Asians [sic] who've been to see City [Coventry] and said that it's a bit racist, you know in the crowd and that. (Amarpreet)

From such comments one could extrapolate that distance engenders denial: as Amarpreet has never been present at a live match at United's home ground and

because he has never even visited the city of Manchester itself. he can create for himself a non-racist identity for the club that he supports, never having been exposed to the possibility (often the reality) of the existence of various forms of racism. The immediacy of his experience of racism within his home town of Coventry, and that of peers who have received/perceived racial intolerance/abuse at the local football ground, leads to the identification of the city of Coventry (and through experiential association) as not necessarily being racist, but moreover, capable of the acts of racist practices, as experienced by a member of an ethnic minority living in the geographical and cultural environs of the city. With many Punjabi-Sikh football fans choosing to pledge their club football support to teams from cities other than those in which they live/and or were born (such as the Liverpool and Manchester United supporters at Keaneston Rovers FC), and if they can also make recourse to the experience/receipt of racial abuse/intolerance within their home city and at their home city's football club, can it then be possible for them to have any strong identification with their hometown? The notion of sport, in this case football, acting as a type of filter for ethnicity is not without some merit here. The large number of Punjabi-Sikh Manchester United and Liverpool fans are enjoined in an intrinsic intra-ethni rivalry of their own which acts as an auxillary battleground to the existing traditional rivalry between the opposing sets of (mainly white) Manchester United and Liverpool supporters. The knowledge and acceptance amongst football-loving Punjabi-Sikhs of the prevalence of support for these two clubs within their ethnic band promotes the idea of these iconic English institutions as being ethnic themselves. If we view the world of these clubs from within a minority group that ostensibly exists away from

the immediate physical presence of the stadia and the localised body of support(ers). then it is possible to understand these clubs as representing something outside the conventional scope of footballing fandom. Manchester United and Liverpool are ethnicised sites of Punjabi-Sikh cultural affirmation and resistance. They at once emblematised this community's interaction with a cultural marker of the dominant white society, whilst also serving as vessels of ethnic pride. The understanding that these clubs are part of a tradition of Punjabi-Sikh footballing support, imbues Punjabi-Sikh identification with them with a culture-specific, ethno-specific charge. The opposite effect also holds currency with some Punjabi-Sikh football fans. The fact that Liverpool and Manchester United are so popularly supported by this community is a cause of some consternation for some young Punjabi-Sikh football fans:

I don't like the way that some Asians (sic) just jump on the bandwagon, you know what I mean, like support United (Manchester) or other big teams just because, you know, just because they're good. I know loads of Asians (sic) who do that. Most United and Liverpool fans don't even know anything about football. Asians (sic) just support who everyone else supports. I hate that. (Sucha).

Encoded in this lambast of 'bandwagon' jumping is a palpable rejection of ethnic solidarity. Here Sucha is dismissive of those Punjabi-Sikhs whom he regards as subscribing to a majority viewpoint (supporting Manchester United and Liverpool as well as other 'big clubs') based on what he believes to be an ethnic alignment or conformity. Sucha was himself a West Bromwich Albion supporter, something he attributed to two main reasons: 'I support Albion because my dad supported them

since he was young and they're our local team... I wouldn't want to support those other teams anyway – everyone else supports them' (Sucha). When taken in the context of his earlier remarks about his disapproval of other Punjabi-Sikhs supporting the bigger clubs such as Manchester United and Liverpool, it is possible to correlate his support for West Bromwich Albion with his rejection of the ethnic conformity that makes many Punjabi-Sikhs place their allegiance with the so-called bigger clubs. In this manner, sport doesn't just possess the potential to act as a filter *for* ethnicity, but it can also serve as a filter *away* from it.

7.4 CONTESTING IDENTITIES

As noted earlier, it is the older players amongst the Keaneston Rovers group that have the closest identification with, and greatest support for Coventry City Football Club, a clear and symbolic expression towards city of Coventry itself. For younger players, non-support of the city's football club, does not necessarily invoke a lack of support for the city. In fact, many of the Rovers's Manchester United and Liverpool fans did claim to 'keep an eye out for City's results' and held Coventry City as a 'second team', partially concurring with Williams's (1994b) view that, "beneath the thin veneer of many a distant Liverpool or Manchester United 'fan' often lies a deeper attachment to a smaller, local club" (p.153). There is only a partial concurrence here, for the attachment that the Rovers's Manchester United and Liverpool fans have for Coventry City FC is not 'deeper' than that they harbour for the two bigger clubs.

They follow the fortunes of Coventry City and have a keen interest in their local club's wished/willed success. but their foremost and 'deepest' attachment is with the clubs based in Liverpool and Manchester. The identification and sense of deep attachment to the city of Coventry, is played out, expressed and channelled through, their negotiation of a regional identity that is constructed around the real and imagined rubrics of their own football club.

The Rovers players have a profound pride in the history of their football club and in its position as an informal institution that stands outside the jurisdiction and definition of more formally established cultural and physical edifices, such as the local Sikh temples or community projects. Parm, who has played for the club as a junior and having progressed through the ranks has been secretary and manager, expressed a common affection for the club:

Rovers's been around a long time, before I was born, before most of us were born, it'll be around probably when I have kids and they can play for us as well. It's not just about being Punjabi, it's not just a Punjabi football club, we're from Coventry do you know what I mean, we're proud of the fact that we're from Coventry. Dave and the others who started it all off wanted the club to be part of Coventry because they were part of Coventry. We're not going to change that, we have the same pride in Rovers being a Punjabi club as we do in it being a Coventry club. (Parm)

There is inherent in the above statement the expression of ethnic and regional identity and pride. The multi-operational/directional nature of this type of conceptualisation of

'identity' is what Hall (1996a) views as, "never unified. and... never singular. but multiply constructed across different. often intersecting and antagonistic. discourses. practices and positions" (p.4). The identification that Parm holds as a Punjabi is located within and is expressed through Keaneston Rovers: Rovers as a Punjabi football club, established by Punjabi-Sikh immigrants, with Punjabi-Sikh players and competing in (amongst others) Punjabi-Sikh tournaments. It is however, at once a Coventry football club – one made up solely of players from the city of Coventry. The identity of the club and of the players within and belonging to the club is constructed at the intersection of the discourses of region and ethnicity. The ethnicity which the Rovers players variously share, or under whose umbrella they take shade, is one that is not essentially embedded in nationalistic sentiment or configuration. Hall states how it is crucial to, "decouple ethnicity, as it functions in the dominant discourse, from its equivalence with nationalism..." (1996b:162). Punjabi-ness is, for the Rovers players, a marker of their difference. one that makes itself apparent and organises its identity when aligned next to the 'dominant discourses' of a pluralistic white 'English-ness' which is culturally and not nationalistically defined/articulated. The ethnic Punjabi identity subscribed to in this instance is not merely in oppositional, counter-cultural response to the white hegemonic forms which pervasively bombard almost every aspect of British Punjabi-Sikhs' lives, it is also the manifestation of a negotiation that differentiates between the ethnicities which are largely overlooked by these hegemonic forms, namely, the divergent 'others' as represented by non-Punjabi-Sikh South Asian groups in Britain:

a lot of white people see us all as just pakis anyway. If
you've got brown skin, and if you've got a funny name

then your Asian. Rovers is a Punjabi club, but there's Shahid. he's a Muslim. He doesn't really get involved in the social side of the club much, you know, he doesn't go out with us and that, he doesn't drink so there's no point really, he's a good player though. Dave's black but he knows how to speak Punjabi, he swears at other Punjabi players on other teams and they turn around and look at him, thinking 'what the fuck did he just say?'. There's a lot of Muslims in Coventry. I've got nothing against them, but we're Sikhs, we have our own history and religion and they have theirs. Rovers is part of ours, everyone knows that Rovers is a Punjabi-Sikh club. (Hardip)

According to Grossberg (1996), "the modern transforms all relations of identity into relations of difference" (p.93). These 'relations of difference' as primary agents in the construction of identities finds apposite articulation in the Punjabi identity espoused by members of Keaneston Rovers Football Club. They view themselves as a Punjabi-Sikh football club, one that is not white (not culturally English) and one that cannot be conflated with other South Asian ethnic/religious minority groups, such as Hindus and Muslims. For the players of Keaneston Rovers, this Punjabi-Sikh identity that is negotiated through 'otherness' is given dominant/'non-other' status within the confines of the club itself. Because of their identification with and in the collective identity of the football club, the Rovers players are able to foreground a version of Punjabi-ness, a Punjabi-Sikh ethnicity that is perpetually constructed and reconstructed, negotiated and re-negotiated through ethnic cultural production that is located within sport and within football. As Hall points out:

...in the various practices and discourses of black cultural production, we are beginning to see a... new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which

depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities (1992:257).

Whilst this 'new ethnic identity' that British Punjabi-Sikhs such as the football players of Keaneston Rovers have forged, and continue to forge, makes historical, geographical and religious recourse to the Indian subcontinent, specifically to the nation-state of India, it does not essentially (or sequentially) define itself or implicate itself in a nationalistic/nationalising framework. Instead, the players of Keaneston Rovers invoke a variation of "neighbourhood nationalism" (Back, 1996:57) that at once culturally distinguishes itself from Englishness and Indian-ness. This neighbourhood nationalism was most evident when Keaneston Rovers travelled to India on a footballing tour of the Punjab, playing the English national game against teams consisting of indigenous Punjabi-Sikhs who were born, raised and worked in the north Indian state of the Punjab.

The tour to India was, for many of the Rovers players, as much a chance to visit families, grandparents in their home towns and villages in the Punjab as it was an opportunity to boast claims of playing 'international football'. Some players were returning to India after long periods of time, seeing relatives who they may not have seen in a number of years. For two of the youngest members, it was their very first journey to the country of their parents' birth. For the majority of Keaneston Rovers, this was not simply a footballing tour in another country - playing football in India signified some elusive and allusive sense of a displaced or possibly a mythical return

to a homeland that they never quite regarded as their own, but one to which they were inextricably attached and to which their family lineage could always be traced back. Whilst their parents or grandparents may have emigrated to Britain with only a transient stay in mind, for the young British Punjabi-Sikh Rovers players, the 'return' was undertaken almost as a homage to the pioneering migration of their forbears, but they were assured of a return to the country in which they themselves were born. This sense of displaced attachment was accentuated by being received by family members in home villages, in a manner of a sort of homecoming only ever reserved for the prodigal. This personal and intimate initial association with India helped alleviate feelings of 'non-Indian-ness' without wholly imbuing them with a concrete feeling of 'Indian-ness', of being Indian among the Keaneston Rovers players. One Rovers player quite bluntly postulated that:

I don't live here; the last time I came to India I was only six. My *bibi* (grand mother) and my *paya* (grandfather) still live here so I can go and see them and show them that I'm still alive you know what I mean. I don't really know all that much about my family in India, I mean, I know what our village is called and who's who and that, but I don't really know what people do here. I know about Indian ways of life back in England, but I don't really know about India's like for someone who lives here, do you know what I mean? (Gurnam)

The Rovers players adjusted their cultural alignment to increase their identification with that which was most indigenously, most manifestly Indian, because they could see their grandparents and uncles and aunts and younger cousins living, working and going to school in India. India was a real place, not just an intimated idyll that existed in black and white photographs or in home videos of weddings. The extrapolation of

India as mythical, as idyllic and as the homeland from such cues as photographs and videos and even from first-hand stories, may have been a somewhat quixotic extension. However, the reality of Keaneston Rovers's footballing experience of India, specifically of the Punjab, was marked by difference and estrangement. The abstract sense of 'coming home' that had been given broken form through the flesh and bones of real people with actual familial attachments, was displaced by the realisation that they were definitely not the 'home' team - Keaneston Rovers were very much playing away.

None of the Rovers players would claim to be staunch nationalists, indeed nationalism and national identity is for them, as it is for many young British South Asians, an ambiguous and ambivalent concern. Moreover, it is a perpetual process of negotiation and re-negotiation (Beckerlegge, 1991; Appadurai, 1997; Werbner, 1997; Anwar, 1998).⁴² The invocation of a pride and a sense of identification with a geographical region was induced by the Rovers players' having to configure their Punjabi-Sikh identity outside of the geographical landscape of the Punjab itself and order their sense of belonging along much more specific, highly localised lines.⁴³

⁴² Nationalism, particularly sporting nationalism is not unrelated to the debate surrounding ethnic/cultural/regional identity, indeed for the latter it is a point that is along a shared continuum. However, it is a debate that would unnecessarily 'over-determine' the issue of locating and defining ethnic identities that make recourse to a specific version of a regional identity that itself works outside of the parameters set by discussions concerning 'nation-states'.

⁴³ There is now a relatively substantial body of literature that pertains to cover the topic of sporting nationalisms. Such works cut across a spectrum of more specifically located debates that concentrate on particular aspects of nationalism, national identity and the construction of the 'ideals' of nation-states through sports (c.f., *inter alia*, Carrington, 1998b; Cronin and Mayall, 1998; Dimeo and Finn, 1998; Duke and Crolley, 1996; Jarvie, 1993; Polley, 1998; Sugden and Bairner, 1993).

During the course of the tour in the Punjab, Keaneston Rovers played football matches against a variety of local Punjabi teams. The majority were college teams made up of young athletic students, and there were also exhibition matches against 'select XI's' that represented various villages or towns. These teams were united in their tactical, technical and physical appreciation of the game of football. In fact, the Punjabi teams were of a superior standard to Rovers, with the Coventry team winning only one match during the entire tour. It was in the course of one such defeat (a 3-0 loss to an exceptional team representing Dharam College in east Punjab), that the Rovers players' rejection of a Punjabi cultural identity which was socially, geographically and historically formulated around the Punjab itself, found clearest expression. As Keaneston Rovers struggled to come to terms with the pace, skill and fluidity of Dharam, shouts of '*Vileythi bandhar*' could be heard from the gathered crowd of spectating Dharam students. *Vileythi bandhar* is a term often used by Indians to irreverently refer to those Indians living in Britain. *Vileythi bandar* literally translated means 'English monkeys' – nothing is, in fact, lost in the translation. The Dharam supporters were just as vociferous and vehement in their support for a Dharam win as they were in their desire for a Keaneston Rovers defeat, that would be, for them, a distinct defeat of the English. In retaliation to taunts and in attempts to rally the Rovers players to give a more competent account of their footballing abilities, shouts of, 'let's do it for Coventry lads' and, 'this one's for Coventry' were shared amongst the struggling Rovers players, rallying calls that were more in response to the re-alignment of cultural identification vis-à-vis the rejection of the Rovers players as being Indian, and instead labelled as English, than it was as a

locally patriotic defence of something English. The notion of 'home' elicited such an outburst; no longer being resident in the idealised/distanced parental homeland, the personification of 'India' as the players of the opposing team led to Coventry now assuming the mantle of 'homeland', with India, in this instance, becoming the 'other' – the home team. As the invited, away team, Rovers made recourse to the city in which their parents and families had made a new home, where many of them were born and raised.. There was/is little by way of a fierce British or rather English nationalism encoded within the localised identification with the city of Coventry. For the Rovers players, 'Coventry' represents something outside of England, something beyond, or more probably, before patriotism. Instead, they invoked a form of ethnic regionalism, whereby the local area - the associated towns of Valleyside, the particular locale which has become home to a dense concentration of various diasporic South Asian communities, particularly a Punjabi-Sikh community, that has come to organise its cultural, social and religious agenda/identity around the rubrics of transnationalism, of migration and of dis-location - becomes a distinct and separate milieu outside of the rest of the country, and which lies outside the intransigent shadow of English nationalism. It is difficult to completely detach this ethnic regionalism from the broader notion of a patriotic identification formulated around the idea of the nation-state: Coventry, for the Rovers players, stands as an ethnicised regional state – a similar principle applied more locally. Team captain Hardip was amongst the most vocal players who urged his team to 'do it for Coventry':

I hated us losing to them. I hate losing anyway, but it's like, well, they think they're better than us because they can speak Punjabi properly and they're you know, proper Punjabis. I've never really felt Indian, like I'm a

born Indian with Indian blood in my veins. I don't ever feel English either. but we've got our own Punjabi stuff in Coventry. I mean look at Rovers. We're a Punjabi football club, you can't really get much bigger than that. I'm proud of where I come from, I'm proud of Coventry because my mum and dad have been here for a long time and they've worked hard to make a good life for us all here. I'm not really fussed about what happens in the *pendh* (village) back in India, that's for them. We've got our own *pendh* in Coventry.

Hardip invokes a sense of authenticity. The Keaneston Rovers players were being derided as much for their Punjabi 'inauthenticity' as they were for their footballing incompetences. However, for British Punjabi-Sikhs such as the players of Keaneston Rovers, the authentic 'control' of the Punjab and its socio-cultural/religious expressions are inauthentic themselves in the sense that they do not pertain to the conditions and patterns of their diasporic existence. Authenticity for British Punjabi-Sikhs derives from lived experience and not distant idylls that exist in cultural vaults unable to recognise the evolving transmogrification of forms of Punjabi-ness. Ferrara (1997) insists that, "[F]or someone to have an authentic identity means then to pursue a project in which a *willed uniqueness* is expressed, and to will that others recognise this uniqueness..." (his italics) (p.81). The indigenous Punjabi players of Dharam College failed to recognise the uniqueness, moreover, the changing uniqueness of the specific, diasporic Punjabi identity that the Keaneston Rovers players pursued to project, a projection that is itself inescapable. This in turn led to the Rovers players positioning themselves on a geo-cultural landscape that embraced diaspora and where ethnic identity and regional identity merged at a crucial intersection.

AT THE FINAL WHISTLE – SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The central thesis this study seeks to maintain and explore is the proposition that sport has been and continues to be a salient feature in the constitution of the Punjabi-Sikh way of life. Historically, sport has proved a notable public (and private) arena in which Punjabi-Sikh people have managed to construct a positive self-identity as a distinct (sportively dextrous) Indian sub-group. Through the processes of migration, Sikh peoples from the Punjab (predominantly men) have proceeded to further harness sport in the changing conditions of diasporic existence. The pioneering immigrant Punjabi-Sikh communities in Britain have established a sound and divergent sporting base from which subsequent generations of British-born Punjabi-Sikhs have negotiated their identifications with both the departed land of their forbears as well as the country in which they reside. The early part of this thesis attempted to present an unfolding narrative through which an understanding of the position of sport in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs in India and in Britain, and the academic place of the study of such a research topic can be ordered. To counter the popularly held (however ill-informed) notion that South Asians do not possess any deep-rooted association with sport, and indeed that they do not have any great propensity for sporting endeavour, this study has endeavoured to outline an intimate historical sportive pedigree for one particular South Asian sub-group. History evinces a pronounced Punjabi-Sikh sporting attachment and legacy that belies the stark minority position of Sikhs in

India. No other sub-continental sub-group has achieved comparable levels of success on national and international stages as Punjabi-Sikhs have managed for nearly an entire century (Singh, 1984). The British Raj's ascription of racially delineated 'martial' qualities onto Punjabi-Sikh men consolidated an existing perception of a religiously ordained warrior-like Sikh martiality. With such perceptions holding little currency in post-war Britain, Punjabi-Sikh sporting prowess has struggled (with gradually increasing success) to divorce itself from the common stereotype of South Asian sporting disinterest. Young Punjabi-Sikhs have not succumbed to the temptation of reverting to stereotype. By continuing and evolving the sporting attachments of this community, many British Punjabi-Sikhs are locating sport centrally in their negotiation of syncretic identities that at once resist and engage certain markers of the dominant culture. Football is one product/aspect of British culture that Punjabi-Sikhs in this country have immersed themselves into as a means of engaging with a popular indigenous British phenomenon. The recorded experiences of the Keaneston Rovers players show that football is a channel through which localised ethnic solidarity is exercised and simultaneously a vessel to harness and celebrate a distinct British Punjabi-ness. While the earlier sections of this study serve to outline the underpinnings of Punjabi-Sikh sporting involvement through the emerging narratives of historical enquiry, the latter chapters have attempted to explore how this diasporic South Asian community has engaged sport in negotiating socio-cultural and ethnic spaces/identities and what the consequences of such engagement are. In essence, this thesis attempts to put forward a qualified response to the line of enquiry that asks: 'do South Asians play sport? If so, how, and with what

effect?' To address these questions representatively, the isolation of a single South Asian community has been necessary. The South Asian community selected to form the focus of this project, Punjabi-Sikhs, can boast a distinct and vaunted sporting pedigree that is not replicated in any other South Asian group.

The Punjabi-Sikh experience of sport in Britain must crucially be located within the wider experiences/mechanics of post-war immigration from the former commonwealth states to Britain. Allied to this, an awareness of the impact of the forces of migration on diasporic individuals, on families, on sub-groups, and how these groups impacted on British society, then provides the social backdrop before which ethnicisation and responses to ethnicisation can be enacted and viewed. By 'ethnicisation' I refer to the processes by which a minority community may acquire an 'ethnic' ascription. Sikhs constitute 2% of India's population, yet in the Punjab they are the most numerous sub-group (as defined by religious affiliation). In the Punjab the Sikh way of life, the outward symbols of their religious observance, clothes, wearing un-shorn hair in turbans, language, food and their shared sense of a collective identity are not regarded as being 'ethnic'. Within the geographical and cultural context of the Punjab, there is little that is peculiar about the observable motifs of Punjabi-Sikh existence. Yet these very attributes are what mark Sikhs in India out as being different to the Hindu majority norm (Bhullar, 1991). The Punjabi-Sikh identity not only distinguishes the Sikh people in the Punjab from other Indians - Hindus, Muslims and Christians as well as other less numerous religiously ordered

groups - but it also ascribes the characteristics of 'Punjabi-Sikh-ness' on the state of Punjab itself. Hence non-Sikhs in the Punjab are the minority (ibid.). Those that do not subscribe to the prevailing symbols and motifs of Punjabi-Sikh culture and religious tradition as it is popularly enacted and understood are viewed as the 'ethnic minority'. In a national Indian context, it is the small Sikh population who represent the minority. Their numerical minoritisation is subject to their distinct religious identity separating them from the Hindu majority. In this case, religion serves to differentiate the Punjabi-Sikhs from the ruling majority group. In the Punjab, groups of Sikhs are further compartmentalised in terms of caste membership and inter-faith denominations. Each group as it is distinguished (and excluded) from the most popularly subscribed majority will attempt to harness the very aspects that render it different. The reduction of larger groups into smaller ones based on increasingly particularised points of divergence creates the space for ethnicity to flourish and also for the possibility of minority ethnic groups to be persecuted. The process of ethnicisation is not simply controlled by the dominant majority, but is also subject to the agency of the given minority group. In Britain, post-war immigration has engendered the ethnicisation of (amongst others) Indian Hindus. For those Hindus who may have considered themselves to be part of a majority in India, the diasporic experience of relocating to Britain led many to set aside points of difference within their own minority band and organise themselves in opposition to the majority, quite plainly that which was not Indian, not Hindu. Vertovec (1996) reported how many immigrant Hindus:

had become more aware of their religion in Britain, as a result of belonging to a minority group in a

predominantly irreligious society... [T]heir collective *vis-à-vis* Christianity and secularism, as it were, takes precedence over their regional, sectarian and caste *vis-à-vis* dynamics (p.87).

This is an instance where “the vernacular has given way to the pan-Indian” (Knott, 1987:165). Immigrants may align themselves with others who share similar experiences of immigration and resettlement. Such unity can extend to a common appreciation of being part of an alien minority in an unfamiliar country where minorities are not afforded the same public and private courtesies that much of the majority population may enjoy. Levinas (1987) makes this point more poetically: “[I]n their uncondition (sic) of being strangers men seek one another. No one is at home. The memory of this servitude assembles humanity” (p.149). In expansive terms, being an immigrant may indeed form the basis of a distinct ethnic identity, of becoming ethnicised. If the ethnic identity of a group “consists of its *subjective*, *symbolic*, or *emblematic* use of any aspect of culture, or a perceived separate origin and continuity in order to differentiate themselves from other groups” (De Vos, 1995:24) (his italics), then the dynamics of immigration (particularly in the context of post-war Britain) can be used to extrapolate the idea of the ethnicisation of immigrant groups from the former British colonies. The ever-reductive proclivity toward seeking out those with shared points of commonality, especially when such points are deemed strange by the dominant society, instructs individuals to group with those with whom they have the most in common. In her studies of Pakistani communities in Britain, Werbner (1996) describes this ethnic magnetism as “a recognition of one’s self in the Other, of the Other in his/her difference and resemblance to one’s self” (p.68). This

schematic conceptualisation of ethnicity as the recognition of shared traits/trajectories implies a degree of self-control. of ethnic affiliation from within. However, it is the condition of being in a minority that beckons forth the drive to seek out those with whom points of commonality can be found and shared. Ethnic minorities do not possess primordial qualities of ethnicity, they 'become' ethnic through a series of related processes (internal and external) that I have referred to as 'ethnification'. The fluid and 'slippery' nature of ethnicity has been commented on by Ratcliffe (1994) for whom it is "in reality elusive" (p.7). Using the thematic imagery of Anderson (1983) he goes on to argue that:

one's identity is not only situationally variant, but it is also a repository for, and partly a function of, exogenous contemporary factors, both material and ideological. It is in essence an "imagined" and/or "fictional" creation (Ratcliffe, 1994:7).

The material and ideological factors of immigration during the initial waves of post-war migration from South Asia set about the processes of ethnicising those who sought to relocate to these (then) foreign shores. However, for the subsequent generations of South Asians born and brought up in this country, the conformation of their ethnic identity has been (and always is) subject to the changing socio-cultural, politico-economic and ideological conditions that impact on Britain. Ethnicity has become an issue for white as well as non-white Britain. It is a perpetual flux and, "is no more fixed or unchanging than the culture of which it is a component or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced" (Jenkins, 1997:13).

Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain have consistently engaged sport in negotiating the processes of ethnicisation and in their responses to this process. They have ordered for themselves an established, visible and productive presence in Britain that has both unique characteristics (religious, cultural, socio-psychological) and aspects of existence that are shared with other South Asian communities resident in this country (the effects of racial discrimination, the experience of minoritisation and also the negotiation and patrol of ethnic identities/boundaries). Sport in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain does not, and has not, existed in a socio/economic/politico-cultural vacuum, isolated from the processes of migration and resettlement. Indeed, it has been an active agent in responding to the realised manifestations that such migration engenders. Any sporting ascriptions that can be applied to Punjabi-Sikhs in this country must be contextualised within the framework of opportunity *vis-à-vis* employment, education and housing as well as this community's access to exercising equal citizenship.

Securing profitable employment to ensure a better standard of life for families and more prosperous futures for children was the original motivating factor to relocate to Britain for the vast majority of South Asian migrants. The willingness and legality of the British labour market to exploit this new workforce meant that even those migrants with high levels of education were almost unilaterally restricted to low-paid manual work. Despite the introduction of legislation that made it illegal to

discriminate against workers on the racial grounds, the practice of discriminatory prejudice in the workplace continued to prevail (Smith, 1977). Early Punjabi-Sikh participation in sport was by no means a priority. Leisure pursuits were often systematically sacrificed to the demands of work. The primary reason for Punjabi-Sikhs to be in this country was not to play *kabaddi*, and any desire to partake of leisure activities was immanently subject to the constant pressure of occupational discrimination. By studying the employment patterns of minority groups since the 1960s and into the 1980s, Mason (2000) asserted that there was:

a pattern of continuing disadvantage, with people from ethnic minority groups clustered in particular industries and occupations, and over-represented in semi-skilled and un-skilled jobs. In addition, there has been a persistent pattern of exclusion altogether from the labour market, with members of minority ethnic groups experiencing consistently higher rates of unemployment than their white counterparts (p.42).

Pioneer Punjabi-Sikh immigrants were forced to withstand such discrimination in order to provide their families (both in this country and often in the Punjab) with the basic provisions of shelter, food and the chance to establish a degree of material comfort. With differential rates of pay in operation, there was little by way of disposable income that could be channelled toward the pursuit of sportive leisure. As a sport that required little financial input for it to be successfully enjoyed, *kabaddi* presented itself as a cost-less and proficient means of indulging in sporting activity. It also allowed for the opportunity to maintain health and fitness, to revel in the company of other sports-minded migrants and to celebrate a particular South Asian cultural phenomenon. A shared sense of equality could well be achieved within the

marginalised company of fellow diasporic Punjabi-Sikhs, but the crucial fact of blatant, overt discrimination in the workplace (and in the labour market as a whole) corrupted the relational basis between migrant workers and the 'host' society.

The most sustained primary interaction between Punjabi-Sikhs settlers and white Britain occurred in the factories and foundries where they secured employment. When this was systematically conferred with a racially discriminatory code (particularly in terms of wages, shift patterns, types of labour, occupational rank), it worked to compound the sense of alienation, subordination and detachment that these pioneer migrants already experienced. Indeed, the idea that South Asians and African-Caribbean immigrants were racially inferior was not without support at the time (Anwar, 1986). The working environment was where the most immediate and sustained contact with British people and British culture occurred for Punjabi-Sikh migrants. Exclusion, discrimination and inequality then (in)formed the central rubrics of their appreciation of what it was to be an immigrant and live and work in this country. This experienced appreciation filtered through to other aspects of their lives such as sport and leisure. Exclusion from certain social clubs and bars was another indication that their presence in this country was tolerated only within particular social dimensions and even then under given conditions. Popular working class sports such as football were the preserve of white (predominantly working class) Britons. It is because of and through these lived conditions that the Punjabi-Sikh sporting ambition organised its own agenda and its own trajectory. The *Shaheedi* Games stand

as a response to exclusion and discrimination. With many Punjabi-Sikh migrants unable to afford to buy tickets to attend football matches, or for those who acceded to the malign pressures that discouraged their attendance/participation in/at sporting events, the tournaments represented a focal, non-white concentration of a distinct ethnic minority's desire to work through the systemic disadvantage and enjoy moments of sportive leisure outside of legitimated inequality.

With *Gurdwaras* increasingly unable to meet the financial demands of organising the tournaments, local business communities (particularly wealthy, sports-minded individuals such as Jagtar Singh Nahar of Nahar Dairies, West Midlands) aided in the staging and development of the tournaments as well as providing an infrastructure for Punjabi-Sikh *kabaddi* teams and players to compete in the events. The success of the *Shaheedi* Games owes a great deal to the contributions of Punjabi-Sikh businesses. The injection of funds and verve enabled Punjabi-Sikh sport in Britain to exist and evolve without being heavily reliant on government sponsorship. The South Asian uptake of small business ventures has variously been attributed to generalised structures of opportunity available to this diverse ethnic minority community, a predisposition toward entrepreneurial goals and the strategies adopted by South Asians to fully exploit the interaction of these two elements (Waldinger et.al, 1990). Whilst there is no mutual exclusivity in the interplay of these three factors, Ram (1993) suggests that, "ethnic business activity is shaped more by external forces than by internal characteristics" (p.570). Once again, as this quote indicates, the limited

opportunities in employment available to South Asians encouraged them to pursue other vocational avenues that would provide their families with basic necessities and any further comforts proportional to the success of their business ventures.⁴⁴ The pathological model of South Asian entrepreneurship denies the sustained disadvantage that ethnic minority communities faced in the labour market and also the fact that many within the different South Asian groups were in no position or in no way inclined toward commercial enterprise. Punjabi-Sikh businessmen who supported the *Shaheedi* Games and patronised sports clubs in Britain were able to do so because of the ingenuity they displayed in the face of limited occupational opportunities:

[T]hese groups have been prepared to take over the jobs and premises left by white workers and employers, and tolerate low wages and poor conditions in order to survive. Hence, rather than having a cultural flair for enterprise, it seemed that minority groups have been sucked into this sector through the limitation of real choices (ibid.).

Subsequent generations of Punjabi-Sikhs who have been born and raised in Britain have experienced some of the advantages brought about by the introduction of employment laws that prohibit racial discrimination in employment. This is not to suggest however that ethnic minorities do not continue to experience varying modes

⁴⁴ Mason (2000) has argued that those examples of South Asian success in small business do not “have any necessary economic pay-off for the wider community” (p.54). He goes on to state that successful ethnic minority businesses should not be held as indicators as to any perceived notion of the simplicity in achieving such entrepreneurial advancement and evading the ill-effects of racial discrimination in

of disadvantage in the labour market. Racial discrimination in employment is now regarded as being almost “invisible” due to the fact that it is so endemic and subtly administered as a matter of routine (Wrench and Solomos, 1993:159). British South Asians may now have access to work away from the manual labour of the depleted manufacturing industries, in managerial posts and in positions of relative occupational ascendancy, but they are still subject to what Heath and McMahon (1995) refer to as an ‘ethnic penalty’. This suggests that employers continue to unfavourably differentiate between (prospective) workers on the grounds of their ethnic membership, or as Modood (1997) puts it, “ethnic minorities may be getting better jobs, but they are still doing so to a lesser extent than white people with the same qualifications” (p.84). So how do the advances surrounding equal opportunities for ethnic minorities and the residual effects of discrimination in vocational spheres, as well as the entrepreneurial successes of South Asian business impact on Punjabi-Sikh sporting experiences?

Keaneston Rovers is an apposite example of a succeeding generation of Punjabi-Sikh sports enthusiasts maintaining and developing the pioneering work of their direct forbears. The social and leisure club where the Rovers team trains, plays and socialises is now run by a member of the team itself (Saroop) who having completed a degree in Economics, has become manager of the centre that his father and uncle

employment. Indeed, “many ethnic minority entrepreneurs in practice find it difficult to escape the limits of an ethnically defined market” (ibid.).

began when he was still a child. Saroop has increased the scope and scale of the business, which in turn has allowed greater funds and facilities to be made available for the betterment of the football club. Small Punjabi-Sikh businesses in various parts of Britain have witnessed the involvement of newer generations of entrepreneurs as sons (and daughters too) have taken over the reigns of various family businesses. Alongside the wider South Asian community, British Punjabi-Sikhs may ostensibly regard the labour market as a far more egalitarian and open occupational arena (Anwar, 1998), but Iganski and Payne (1996) have shown that despite the growth in non-manual work and increased meritocracy in employment, there is evidence to suggest that over-achieving groups (ethnic minorities) are not adequately or proportionately rewarded for the jobs that they do. In essence, “for the more competitive posts, ethnic minority individuals have to be not just as good but better than their white competitors in order to get the job” (Modood et al., 1997:145). Unemployment amongst South Asians is also disproportionately high, a statistic which belies the common preconception of this diverse ethnic minority group’s vocational dexterity and ingenuity. In fact, there are stark differences in the levels of unemployment amongst the different South Asian communities with Bangladeshis amongst the highest representatives of unemployed people in Britain (ibid.). Employment opportunities for ethnic minorities in sport too are not exempt from this disadvantage. Although there is no documented evidence stating the number of South Asians working in the expansive sports industry (ranging from professional sports players through to coaches, sports centre managers, physical trainers), only two respondents in this study had any working professional involvement in the area of

sport.⁴⁵ Employment opportunities for ethnic minorities in professional sport are seemingly ordered by a similar categorising code that imbues some minority communities (African-Caribbeans) in Britain with a 'naturalised' predisposition toward sporting endeavour/competition and others without. The minimal presence of South Asians in popular British sport, moreover the absence of South Asians from the nation's sportive psyche, may be a determining factor in their under-representation within the wider vocational circle of sports occupations. The continuing growth of the service sector has provided ethnic minorities with greater job opportunities in the wake of the demise of the manufacturing industries (Modood et al., 1997). Yet this South Asian occupational expansion has so far seemingly failed to manifest in the sports industry. Until a comprehensive study of South Asian employment opportunities in this sector is carried out, there can be little by way of firm statements as to the numbers of British South Asians working in sport and in which capacities. From the research already available on ethnic minorities and employment in this country (cf., *inter alia*, Heath and McMahon, 1997; Modood et al., 1997; Anwar, 1998), the existing structures of differentiation and disadvantage would continue to apply.

British professional sport is also yet to boast a notable collective South Asian presence. Nasser Hussain, a cricketer of 'mixed-race' origins whose father is Indian

⁴⁵ It may be a telling fact that one of these respondents worked as a gymnasium assistant in the leisure centre that Keaneston Rovers used as their base and which was owned by one of the team members

has achieved the captaincy of the England cricket team. a squad which also includes Mark Ramprakash, Owais Shah and Usman Afzaal all of whom would be variously described as South Asian. Whilst the sporting achievements of these players in representing their country in international sport should not be undermined, it has to be noted that cricket is one of the few sports that is readily associated with South Asians (Fleming, 2001). Whilst there remain obstacles in the path of sporting attainment for South Asian cricketers across Britain (as noted in Chapter 1), the successes of cricket teams from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, as well the prominence of individual players such as Kapil Dev, Imran Khan, Shoaib Akhtar and Sachin Tendulkar have embedded an intimate association between South Asians and sporting prowess *a la* cricket in the minds of those who watch and control the game. Football does not boast any such acclaimed South Asian excellence. No South Asian player is yet to play in the highest division of English football. Harpal Singh, a Punjabi-Sikh footballer employed by Leeds United Football Club was sent on loan to play for Division Two outfit Bristol Rovers in February 2002 but returned to Leeds only three weeks later. He is yet to play in the first team for Leeds United. The lack of a visible South Asian presence in the upper echelons of professional British football seemingly filters down to the ancillary areas of employment associated with the game. The football industry has a multiplex of associated enterprises and areas of employment that do not seem to proportionately represent the diversity of the communities that often reside on their very doorstep.⁴⁶ The fallacious idea that South Asians have no interest in football or

who was the other respondent who claimed a professional sporting involvement.

⁴⁶ I was unable to gather any recorded data on ethnic minorities working at football clubs in the Premiership. I did make telephone calls to all twenty clubs and inquired about any equal opportunity policies that they may operate in relation to employment. Despite my assurances that the data was only

sport saturates not just the playing aspects of professional sport, but it also seemingly permeates its associated vocational fields. The African-Caribbean prevalence in British sport is a double-edged sword that on the one hand provides black-Britons with opportunities to excel in professional sport, but also serves to keep them within the racialised parameters of what the controlling authorities perceive to be apposite.

Hall (1998:43) elaborates:

[A]re blacks in the boardrooms of the clubs? Of course not. Are they relatively powerless in the institutions which organize the game? Of course. The question is whether they have any currency, any visibility in the culture of sport where the nation's myths and meanings are fabricated. The answer must be 'yes', and to say this is to note the significant degree to which the culture has turned in the past fifteen years or so.

Britain's black population may indeed have a degree of 'currency' in the nation's 'culture of sport', but South Asians have yet to attain (or be afforded) such currency. They remain on the fringes of, if not absent from, the popularised spheres of national sport. Carrington and McDonald (2001) have remarked that, "sport is one of the clearest and most public means in demonstrating how Britain has become a multicultural nation" (p.3). Yet South Asians are relatively invisible from this public demonstration of British multiculturalism. With so-called second and third generations of South Asians making innovative and sustained contributions to British society and culture, their omission from the world of sport has to be traced through

for academic purposes, no club agreed to talk to me in any great detail about this matter. Bains (1995) reported that over a third of professional football clubs in England that responded in his study had no equal opportunities policy.

their experiences of the British education system and contextualised through the educative practices they have received.

Physical education and extra-curricular sports activities can be the most effective means of recognising sporting aptitudes amongst school children. However, with certain groups of pupils being conferred with naturalised sportive capacities and others with greater propensities for educational advancement, the racialisation of the strengths and weaknesses of different ethnic communities is inculcated from an early age (Bayliss, 1989; Fleming, 1995). Williams (1989:167) has noted this tendency amongst education practitioners with regard to South Asians:

[T]he Asian (sic) pupil is typically seen as physically frail, lacking in stamina and likely to under-achieve in physical education, in contrast to their stereotype as quiet, hardworking and intelligent in the classroom.

The lazy contradiction of such rationale is increasingly apparent not just in the positive aspects of South Asian sporting achievement, but somewhat more negatively in the media coverage of South Asians in locations such as Leeds and Oldham, where economic and social disadvantage has led to increased racial tension between the majority white population and minority Pakistani-Muslim youths. As disturbing as the images of these groups of British South Asians charging at riot police and turning over burnt cars are, they also inadvertently damage the very stereotypes that seek to posit them in traditional roles of meek and cerebral diligence. It is in schools that sporting ability is most often recognised and nurtured in its early stages, and it is also where such sporting ability can be systematically ignored. Comments by physical education practitioners such as: "Asian (sic) children have low ball skills" (cited in

Bayliss, 1983:pp.6-7). “Asian (sic) children are not encouraged to play with toys, balls, ropes and this effects their ability to play games” (ibid.) and “Asians (sic) are too frail for contact sports” (cited in Bayliss, 1989:20) have resulted in South Asians receiving little encouragement in sporting pursuits, and little recognition of any sporting aptitudes. Instead, the easily accepted popular notion of South Asians only being interested in education and good grades has been used to apply emphasis on the academic performance of South Asian pupils in the classroom rather than in the gymnasium or sports field. The ‘benign stereotype’ of the South Asian academic achiever that Klein (1993) outlines is a direct result of South Asian parents understanding the need for educational attainment and qualifications for their children to be able to secure good jobs and hence a prosperous and comfortable life. Their own experiences of living as invited immigrants in this country have helped shape the appreciation that racism and disadvantage are prevalent for ethnic minorities in Britain. Thus, progressing successfully through the education system is one means by which such effects of discrimination may be combated.

As noted in Chapter 7, the tautology that works to de-prioritise sport in the lives of young South Asians has its roots in the perceived obstacles that parents believe face their children in the labour market (a point verified by Modood et al., 1997), obstacles which have the capacity to prevent them from achieving a degree of prosperity greater than their own. This drive toward educational advancement is then used to

legitimate erroneous ideas of South Asians lacking any great physical dexterity or sporting prowess, and being solely talented in areas restricted to academic fields (Bayliss, 1989). African-Caribbean pupils have traditionally endured the opposite effect of such stereotyping. This ethnic minority's successes in professional sport (associated with unqualified ideas of superior black physiological capacities for sport, and by implication inferior intellectual abilities) has led some education practitioners to encourage their participation in sports at the expense of their academic work and ambitions (Hayes and Sugden, 1999).

The sporting advances and successes of British African-Caribbeans may indeed be counter-productive if academic pursuits are de-prioritised in favour of sporting advancement, as these may deny many black Britons opportunities outside of sport. This scenario is further compounded when the African-Caribbeans as a group are perceived to possess only sporting potential/ability. Indeed the image of black sporting achievement and success may serve to obfuscate the disadvantages, discrimination and relative powerlessness of this ethnic minority group within British society. Black sporting success may have the popular resonance to paper over the cracks that exist in issues of racial disadvantage and (un)equal minority rights in Britain, but it does not rectify or ameliorate the elementary causes of such social dysfunction. Hoberman (1997) has suggested that the prominence of black sports men and women in America has encouraged an African-American "addiction to

athleticism” that has assumed a state of “social pathology” (p.85). This is a problematical position to adopt for it is indicative of:

a classic way in which those discriminated against are then blamed for their own subordinate position, diverting attention away from structural inequalities, and toward the perceived moral inadequacies of the individuals themselves (Carrington and McDonald, 2001:11).

It could be argued that Britain’s South Asian communities (with the possible exception of Bangladeshis)⁴⁷ have unwittingly avoided the process of manufacturing their own continued powerlessness by failing to attain comparable levels of prominent sporting success as their African-Caribbean counterparts. The advantages of the ‘academically inclined’ South Asian may indeed serve this community with greater multiplicity of opportunities in terms of employment and social mobility. Scholarly success can lead to a good job, which in turn can secure relative financial freedom that itself promotes the idea-illusion of social equality. Successful entrepreneurial endeavour is another means by which wealth can be achieved. The conflation of wealth with success and social mobility is one that is quite endemic within many South Asian cultures and Punjabi-Sikhs are no exception (Ballard, 1994). Some African-Caribbeans may regard sport as an avenue to escape relative poverty and achieve a better standard of living if not high levels of wealth and fame. The reproduction of sport as a ‘route out of the ghetto’ by those who co-ordinate and control access to sport as well as from within the African-Caribbean communities

⁴⁷ Britain’s Bangladeshi community remains one of the least socially mobile groups. Economic disadvantage in terms of poor housing, high unemployment and lack of employment prospects has

themselves, will continue to manufacture the powerlessness that this ethnic minority group continues to experience. Sport can in this way be a 'side-track' that diverts energies away from other (educational or vocational) pursuits that may hold the potential for greater levels of achievement than professional sport (Carrington, 1983). The popular perpetuation of sport as this conditioned 'promised land' of black success does detract from advances being sought and made in other fields when the popular stereotype of the sportive black person informs the reasoning of the nation's teachers and employers (be they white or members of an ethnic minority). For many South Asians, the drive is not so much to escape the ghetto, but rather to advance professionally and socially by whichever means is most efficacious and most available at their disposal. Recent history has shown that academic advancement and entrepreneurial endeavour have provided the principal routes by which such progression can be achieved. This has in turn meant that other areas such as sport have been neglected, not just by South Asians themselves but by those within the sports infrastructure whose purpose is to encourage all people in sporting pursuits regardless of ethnic affiliation. In a near opposite effect of the African-Caribbean dilemma, South Asians have not been distracted enough by sport. There have been scholarly explications of sport providing moral, social and even ethical rewards and codes of conduct (Cashmore, 1990b; Elias and Dunning, 1986; Hyland, 1990; Simon, 1985), but such sportive lessons have been largely unavailable to South Asians through traditional/conventional channels. Hyland (1990) notes that those:

who praise sports for their capacity to teach the values
of teamwork, self-discipline and fair play, invariably

meant that many Bangladeshis (particularly in east London) live below the poverty line. See Modood, T. et al. (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain – Diversity and Disadvantage*.

appeal to the promise that those values, learned in a sporting context, will be useful. perhaps even more useful, in the context of life itself (p.2).

The Punjabi-Sikh sporting history and participation in this country has allowed members of that community to enjoy the benefits of playing sports, such as camaraderie, a sense of fair play, resilience, competitiveness, magnanimity and self-discovery amongst others, without this being to the detriment of the various other aspects of their lives, especially among young people. Such qualities are replicable/applicable in the wider society outside of sport. Indeed the former footballer turned writer and philosopher Camus (1995) famously claimed that all he had learned about morality and ethics was learned from sport. For some ethnic minority members in this country (particularly African-Caribbeans) the 'positive' lessons of conduct gleaned from sport that may inform the way they live their lives may be less significant than the diversionary effects of participating in sport. It may be a combination of such learned values and the simple fact of offering people who suffer disadvantages in employment, education and social equality something constructive through which their redundant energies can be channelled, reduces the possibility of such energies being diverted/corrupted toward anti-sociability and even criminality. There are numerous examples of young African-Caribbeans (in Britain and America) who claim that sport and their serious uptake of sporting pursuits prevented them from being subsumed into a life of crime and operative illegality (Cashmore, 1982a). Sport is presented to a minority group as a means by which an escape from the prevailing conditions of their disadvantage can be negotiated.

diverting attention away from the causes of their disadvantage and offering the potential rewards/remedies as a false ethnic panacea that addresses only the symptoms. The learning of values such as teamwork, self-discipline and fair play are not necessarily primordial qualities attached to the quintessence of sport, they are a “reflection of the values inherent in a given society. That is, the values originate in the society at large, and are then reflected in the sports that that society generates” (Hyland, 1990:3). The values of the hegemonic ideology of the ruling majority may not always be in concordance with those of the divergent minority groups resident in society. It may sometimes be that some qualities may be antithetical to some members of minority groups, or in Marxian critical terms, sport is another vehicle by which the hegemony of the majority can be maintained. Similar to the illusory ethnic autonomy of the Punjabi-Sikh experience of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments, sport offers, “a dramatic commentary on reality rather than an escape from it – a heightened re-enactment of communal traditions, not a repudiation of them” (Lasch, 1988:415). For African-Caribbeans in Britain, success in sport through hard work, dedication and talent can be an isolated, short-term escape from reality (if and when that reality involves the limitation of equality and opportunity in other spheres of society), but it does not begin to address the concerns of the greater part of black-Britons who may not harbour sportive ambitions or have any great propensity for any sport.

Young Punjabi-Sikhs such as many of the players of Keaneston Rovers have actively participated in playing for and helping to run their football club without such commitments exacting any considerable corrosive effect on either academic work or their pursuit of prosperous careers or family business ventures. The failure to encourage those young Punjabi-Sikhs who may have shown particular sporting talents to pursue professional sport as a career, is another factor why their schoolwork and careers may not have been compromised. When a group is denied a sporting identity and even access to sport, then their uptake of sporting activities is not so much a side-track or corruptive distraction, rather (as in the case of Rovers) it is seemingly subsumed into the very constitution around which the rest of their working and learning lives are arranged. Sport has not been proposed as an 'escape' from the reality of ethnic minority disadvantage for those South Asians for whom opportunities in other fields may be limited. Those professional pursuits such as law, medicine, commerce and more recently the media (in increasingly visible roles) in which South Asian advancement has been shown to be permissible and prosperous, have been held as markers (within and outside of the South Asian communities) of this diverse group's range of ability, their sphere of capability, a sphere which does not include sport. The perceived aptitudes amongst a few within a minority have been used to compartmentalise the abilities and uses of entire groups. Not every black person in Britain is a fast runner and not every South Asian is good with numbers. The perceived confinement of black British social and professional advancement to sporting spheres may have resulted in obscuring the reality of their subordinate position in society, but it is a phenomenon that can only be rectified by reducing the

discrimination against African-Caribbeans in other professional areas in which they do not boast such a visible presence and high rate of achievement. Similarly, the successes of South Asians in education and small business does not obscure the fact that their achievements are only permissible with certain limitations. The lack of South Asians in boardrooms of major companies or even in senior management positions, the limited number of South Asian politicians, police chief-constables and university chancellors all indicate that there is a 'glass ceiling' that restricts South Asian professional progression (Modood et al., 1997). In sport too, South Asians may represent the England cricket team at international level yet they are absent from the boards that decide the direction and composition of the county clubs (McDonald and Ugra, 1998). By over-emphasising South Asian achievements in particular spheres (even when such achievements are seemingly within certain parameters), this ethnic minority community (as well as the dominant majority) deny the operative forces that continue to refuse them access to success in other professional spheres such as sport. The values that sport may inculcate in individuals within societies have not been lost on South Asians. The example of Punjabi-Sikhs offers the perspective that values such as teamwork, fair play and discipline (imbricated into British sports such as football) have been re-appropriated by an ethnic minority largely outside of the dominant sporting circle. Teamwork and discipline are augmented in Punjabi-Sikh football teams (like Keaneston Rovers) by shared notions of ethnic identity/solidarity, familial diasporic histories and regional affiliation. The inherent values of British society that sport in this country reflects and perpetuates are not necessarily antithetical to the evolving Punjabi-Sikh culture, instead it could be argued that they

are used by Punjabi-Sikhs to enhance their understanding of their own position as an ethnic minority group within the dominant society that imposes such values. Sport may not solely be a conduit for imparting dominant systems of values onto minorities, it may also be a common intersection where values can be appropriated by a minority group to precipitate the consolidation of distinct spaces/identities outside of that dominant majority.

It would be naïve to assume that with many Punjabi-Sikhs, and South Asians in general enjoying sustained academic attainment, that this would be at least one area where there would be little trace of discrimination. However, the British education system, “far from being meritocratic... is actually designed to reproduce and legitimize unequal outcomes... [and] in modern societies, equality of opportunity can never mean anything more than having an equal chance to be unequal” (Mason, 2000:77). The prospects and achievements of South Asians in sport (professional, amateur and leisurely) must be viewed in respect of the generic position of disadvantage from which they engage with British society and toward which British (white) society engages with them. The most recent Policy Studies Institute survey of ethnic minorities in Britain has shown that whilst some South Asian communities have continued to make relative advances in reaching near comparable levels of achievement as their white counterparts (including some areas of education and restricted areas of employment), many members of these diverse communities continue to suffer the effects of disadvantage and discrimination that spills through to

issues such as housing and community relations particularly with local police forces (Modood et al., 1997). The police force which should purportedly stand as an uncorrupted and impartial enforcer of law and order is in fact regarded quite differently by ethnic minorities:

[T]he majority of young members of the minority groups do not believe they can rely on the police to protect them from racial harassment. In fact, regardless of age, a majority of Caribbeans and (especially) of South Asians believe that they should organise self-defence groups (p.354).

With such low levels of confidence in institutions of authority, the structures of support required to encourage South Asians into sporting domains that have traditionally remained the preserve of white Britain, with an increased contemporary African-Caribbean participation, must address issues concerning all areas of societal life in this country, and at the same time recognise the heterogeneity of the various communities that constitute this population. It may not be enough to compensate for one social inadequacy and inequality by addressing the problems of another. There is scope for optimism as the PSI survey's authors have indicated:

[T]he conclusion of this survey has to be that, while the circumstances of the minorities show some common sources of inequality, the diversity is proving to be extremely resilient and is far from confined to aspects of private culture... [T]he emphasis needs to be on common rights and responsibilities. Membership of a specific ethnic community has to be accorded greater political importance than it has had hitherto, but should be complimented with an equally meaningful membership that brings all citizens together regardless of their ethnic group (pp.358-359).

On the basis of the evidence collected in this study, sport continues to be a cultural site of struggle as well as a social arena that is capable of positive interaction between different communities (non-white and white) in Britain. The residual and persistent effects of racism (in its varied forms) continues to act as a deterrent to some members of minority groups from accessing successive levels of sports participation and also spectatorship. From school physical education teachers who may be impervious to the idea of South Asian sporting dexterity, through to professional football club scouts and coaches who maintain false doctrines of South Asian cultural and physical unsuitability to sport, South Asians who want to progress through to the higher levels of sporting achievement in Britain are seemingly hindered by an existing, racially formed barrier of ignorance. Such ignorance is in turn feeding the drive to partake of sports by any other means available to South Asians, or indeed to manufacture the means for themselves. The establishment of all-South Asian football teams, leagues and competitions is one way in which ethnic minority communities are refusing to be denied access to participation as well as the culture of sport. The inclusion of young people from outside the predominant community group of certain clubs is a positive sign that sport can be a healthy means for the interaction of people from different ethnic (and non-ethnic) groups. Keaneston Rovers have a traditional and contemporary identity as a Punjabi-Sikh football club. The inclusion within the club's fold of African-Caribbean players as well as white and Pakistani-Muslim players suggests that the club's ethnic identity is not rigidly incumbent on the total mono-ethnicity of its members. Keaneston Rovers do not appear to be in a crisis of identity simply because they admit non-Punjabi-Sikhs into their club and allow them to

represent their club on the football pitch. The inclusion of non-Punjabi-Sikhs in the social activities surrounding the club's existence points to a readiness on behalf of the ethnic institution to encourage the type of wholesome participation that has been traditionally denied to South Asians wanting to revel in all the associated joys of football.

The focus of this study on Punjabi-Sikhs, and in particular on a Punjabi-Sikh football team does not deny the existence of sporting clubs made up of other South Asian groups. Pakistani-Muslim sports clubs in parts of Lancashire are on-going community concerns that are beginning to receive funding from local council authorities in recognition of their work with young Pakistani-Muslims in particular areas. In east London too, young Bangladeshi-Muslims have established their own teams and leagues in response to the increasingly intolerable racial abuse suffered when playing white teams (Bains, 1995). The scope of this project was not able to undertake any detailed analyses of South Asian sports organisations other than those representing (and represented by) Punjabi-Sikhs. Keaneston Rovers, for example had never played against another predominantly or all-South Asian team that did not consist largely of Punjabi-Sikh players. The location of teams such as Rovers in the West Midlands has meant that with Punjabi-Sikhs as the predominant South Asian group in this area, the South Asian football teams that they play against are of similar constitution to themselves. There is one particular team that hails from Shelby (the home of *Guru Nanak Gurdwara* Shelby) who have reached semi-professional levels of competition

and pay their players accordingly. This team is the most successful in tournaments and has a mix of Punjabi-Sikh and Pakistani-Muslim players. There is a residual (often hostile) antipathy between many groups of Muslim and Sikh youths in Britain (Gillespie, 1995) and the West Midlands has certain regions where one minority group may be in the numerical and cultural ascendancy. Shelby is increasingly becoming home to greater numbers of Pakistani-Muslims as members of the larger Punjabi-Sikh community looking to move to suburban areas. Whilst intra-ethnic tension is not outwardly evident from within the closed ranks of the football club, it has been noted that certain Pakistani-Muslim players have been barracked by Punjabi-Sikh supporters from the crowds at tournaments. The wearing of long beards makes some Muslim players easily discernible, rendering them easy targets for the Islamophobic taunts of small-minded (and often drunk) individuals. The inclusion of other all-South Asian teams into the competitive belly of the *Shaheedi* Games would engender interesting dynamics as to how different South Asian communities engage with each other in a traditionally English masculinised arena. Without corroborative evidence to support such analysis it would be foolish to offer conjecture on the nature of such engagement. Sport may indeed help to provide an organised setting in which to 'play out' and partially diffuse ethnic rivalries or it may exacerbate these further. This is another area of critical enquiry that has the potential to produce interesting data.

It could be concluded from the findings in this study that Punjabi-Sikhs are more inclined toward participating in certain sports and not others. For the younger generations (and for many older Punjabi-Sikhs too) football stands apart as the most popular sport amongst this South Asian community, both in terms of playing and watching games, either at football grounds or on television. The fear of racial abuse continues to act as a deterrent (to differing degrees) for some Punjabi-Sikh football supporters, and so the construction of various strategies of negation and negotiation serve to maintain their engagement and identification with their favoured club. The mass uptake of satellite and digital television subscription to watch live football matches, the robust rejection of the effects of a racist minority and the ascription of personal attachments to football clubs (circumventing the racism dilemma) are amongst the dynamic means by which Punjabi-Sikhs enact their footballing support.

Sports such as cricket, tennis, golf and rugby were not of high priority amongst the Punjabi-Sikh respondents in this study. That is not to suggest that these sports hold little interest for this South Asian minority. It is rather more indicative of the limitations of this study that other sporting pursuits and passions were not suitably investigated. My own experiences of 'talking sport' with Punjabi-Sikhs in various parts of Britain would draw attention to the point that almost all sports hold some degree of interest, if not excitement, for this diverse group. I would hesitate in suggesting that there is some innate predisposition toward the appreciation of sporting pursuits amongst Punjabi-Sikhs, but a recurring pattern of sports enthusiasm is

palpably detectable. There are certain prohibitive factors that dissuade Punjabi-Sikhs from participating in sports such as cricket and golf. The cost of equipment (whether to buy or hire) could deter those who may not be able to afford such luxuries. The lack of facilities, clubs, grounds where those sports (and others) can be played may not be available in the areas where Punjabi-Sikhs reside, or they may have restrictive membership policies. The essentialising assertion of Singh (1984) that sports such as cricket, table-tennis and badminton “which involve little physical exertion... do not attract many Punjabis” (p.vi), is negated by the match-winning exploits of Punjabi-Sikh international cricketers such as Harbhajan Singh, and also by young aspiring British golfer Sandip Bains (born and raised in Britain by Punjabi-Sikh parents). Bains is a precociously talented teenage golfer who is seeking to pursue a career in professional golf and is regarded by his coach as a very gifted player.⁴⁸

From the accounts received of Punjabi-Sikh sporting ambition in this work it is clear that an emerging generational shift is in process. Those Punjabi-Sikh sports enthusiasts such as GNG Shelby’s Tony were unable to fully pursue their desires to take up sport professionally (in Tony’s case football) because of a convergence of various reasons. A lack of parental support, the threat of permanent and debilitating injury, fear of physical racial abuse and the low prestige status of sport (as a means of social and economic advancement) were restrictive forces from within Punjabi-Sikh

⁴⁸ I was able to speak with Bains’s uncle (who also represents him as a manager figure) and was told that Sandip Bains was not interested in being a champion British-South Asian golfer, but rather in

communities themselves that prevented 'wannabe' footballers from attempting to take up the sport professionally. Racial discrimination on the part of sports organisations such as football clubs that refused to acknowledge the skill and ability of Punjabi-Sikh players despite their demonstrated aptitudes, was a major factor in keeping football free of South Asians. The structures of support that aided young white boys, from families, schools, area sports clubs through to professional football clubs were patently non-existent for young Punjabi-Sikhs (Bains, 1995). The emergence of football as a viable and profitable career option, as well as an avenue to achieving some semblance of 'high' status has allowed some Punjabi-Sikhs (including those who may themselves have not been given the encouragement/opportunity to continue in the game) to support the footballing aspirations of their sons, nephews and younger brothers. Whilst football has worked to rid itself of the parasitic racism that attached itself to the terraces, there remains a scattered ignorance of the South Asian footballing devotion and talent amongst scouts, coaches, managers and chairmen of football clubs that continues to compound the efforts of South Asians seeking to make the elusive breakthrough into the professional game.

The lack of investment into developing South Asian/Punjabi-Sikh sports, moreover sports facilities/opportunities for South Asians in Britain by local authorities, sports clubs and professional organisations has meant that the financial and motivational

simply being the best 'golfer' he could be. They were very cautious of promoting his ethnic identity above and before his abilities and achievements/potential as a golf player first and foremost.

impetus for such development has come from within the Punjabi-Sikh community itself. The involvement of the *Gurdwaras* and Punjabi-Sikh businessmen in establishing the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments, in setting up South Asian sports organisations and setting up football, *kabaddi* and other sports clubs has been crucial to this community's engagement with sport. When denied sporting access and participation, Punjabi-Sikhs have shown the verve and ingenuity to organise a sporting landscape of their own making. Such innovative work has to be taken further to build upon its historical successes. The inclusion of other South Asian groups (as well as white and African-Caribbean peoples) into Punjabi-Sikh football clubs would be a move toward greater inclusivity. The opening up of the tournaments too may lead to them becoming multi-ethnic events incorporating more than simply sports, turning them from ethnic events to mass-participation events. The carnival atmosphere could be utilised to create a festive distraction for all the different people from regional locations to experience a moment when the world can be 'turned upside down'. Such evolutions are quite dependent on the imaginative intervention of local authority policy makers and practitioners who have the power to decide on which direction the actions and interactions of different communities may take.

The historical anchorage that evinces the lived implications of migration and resettlement must be applied to reconstructing the heritage of migrant communities that underpins cultural, religious, social, political, economic and motivational aspects of their lives. Thus, a historical account of the genesis and evolution of the Sikh faith,

as well as an exposition of the origins and development of the north Indian state of the Punjab, bear an informing, contextualising illuminative light on the sporting experiences of Punjabi-Sikh peoples outside of their, at least nominal, homeland. In the same vein, sport in the Punjab and on the Indian subcontinent must be brought out from under the shadow of imperialist discourses for any subsequent manifestations of South Asian sporting practices/pursuits (wherever they may be located/translated) to be recognised as articulations of South Asian cultural expression/production, and not reductively assigned to progenitorial British imperialist legacies. This is not to disavow the importance of current flows of socio-cultural negotiation and exchange that young (and old) Punjabi-Sikhs experience with and through sport. The move of some Punjabi-Sikh football clubs into semi-professional leagues is engendering a shift in emphasis for such organisations. Their primary mode of existence as loci for local Punjabi-Sikhs to play football in a safe and rewarding environment may in the future become relegated as a secondary concern. By paying their players to compete and recruiting players from other teams and other areas, some Punjabi-Sikh football clubs are venturing into areas of commerciality that may see them transformed into business ventures rather than community concerns. The need to provide historical context to the contemporary experiences of sport for Punjabi-Sikhs in this country has been necessary, as no such history has been made available in the past. However, the politico-cultural climate of Britain is now far more unsettled and conditioned by the increasing heterogeneity of the British population. Young Punjabi-Sikhs have equal claims to British citizenship with all its associated privileges and are themselves helping to shape the re-conceptualisation of national notions of 'British-ness'. With

sport being amongst the most widely consumed markers of this new age of poly-ethnic British identity, the identifications and participatory associations that a sizeable ethnic minority makes with sport should be regarded with an appropriate exigency. Current social and academic concerns surrounding the formation of ethnic identities and the reconstitution of nationalisms, as well as the increasing global impact of sport in societies (large and small) in the new millennium means that now, more than ever, explorations of the sport-ethnicity debate require detailed attention located in the lived experiences of the here-and-now. There remains room for historical exposition, indeed wherever contemporaneous social enquiry seeks to assume any type of scholastic authority, there must be a developed bedrock of historical analysis that serves to anchor it. This is what this study has attempted and it is hoped it shall be a humble point of departure from which further imaginative and theoretically diverse projects can be formulated.

For young British Punjabi-Sikhs, sport, particularly football, has been deployed as a means of engaging with both the culture and communal traditions of their ‘mother-culture’ (i.e. the customs and practices from which their parents/grandparents descend), and, the traditions and social expressions of the culture into which they have been born and raised. No longer willing to maintain a surreptitious association (however intimate and active that may be) with the sport, British Punjabi-Sikhs are attempting to remove for themselves the shackles that have denied them access to the bastion of professional British football (Bains and Johal, 1999). The players of

Keaneston Rovers Football Club are apposite examples of how British Punjabi-Sikhs negotiate poly-dimensional identities that do not seek to be schismatically defined by placing themselves in distinct, neat categories. Instead, such identities are formulated through a process of incorporating varied aspects that impact on their lives, such as religion, mother-culture traditions, politics, notions of 'home' and 'otherness', and these do not stew in a cultural melting pot (Glazer and Moynihan, 1996), but instead form the constituent parts of an intra-personal socio-cultural whirl. There is an almost unhesitating engagement with the reality that theirs is a syncretic culture not 'caught between two cultures' (as admonishingly decreed by early scholars of ethnic minorities in Britain), rather that they live with more than one culture, more than one identity, the notion of cultural *bricolage* (Hall, 1993:310) whereby diverse elements converge to varying degrees to render and maintain identities that are fluid and receptive to the changing conditions of (post)modernity with all its fractures, disruptions and inauthenticities; a notion eloquently expressed by Asad when he states that, "in the vision of a fractured, fluid world, all human beings live in the same cultural predicament... [E]veryone is *dislocated*; no-one is rooted" (his italics) (1993:9-10).

As doctoral theses impose the limits of time, money and word space on the amount and nature of the content of the final product, there are areas of debate and exposition that such restrictions have denied in this study. The sporting focus of the study was predominantly located within football and *kabaddi* and although these sports stand

apart from all others in their position in the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain, there are other sporting activities that this ethnic minority community have an active engagement with. There are Punjabi-Sikh wrestlers who continue to train and compete on an amateur basis in parts of the West Midlands. Whilst they do not represent the type of anchoritic wrestling cultures of North India (Alter, 1992), Punjabi-Sikh wrestlers in Britain continue to regard their bodies with an almost divine reverence, maintaining disciplined bodily strength and physical conditioning. Hockey continues to be played by many Punjabi-Sikhs in this country, indeed, in Birmingham, older Punjabi-Sikhs (those who would have played in the early years of the *Shaheedi* Games tournaments) organise their own 'veteran' teams and play against a variety of white and other South Asian hockey teams of similar/suitable veneration. The omission of any prolonged discussion of cricket in the lives of British Punjabi-Sikhs may seem somewhat of an anomaly. However, whilst cricket is variously played by Punjabi-Sikhs in this country, it does not hold the same passion and enthusiasm for Punjabi-Sikhs as does football. Indeed, in the Midlands, parts of Greater London but particularly in Yorkshire and Lancashire, it is Pakistani-Muslims that have extremely vibrant and productive cricketing cultures that have only begun to be given scholarly attention (Williams, 1994; Khan, 1996; McDonald and Ugra, 1998). The under-representation of Punjabi-Sikhs in the Indian national Test team over the last half-century may be an indicator as to why this community has not associated with the sport as intimately and as numerously, as their Pakistani-Muslim, and indeed, British-Hindu counterparts. British Punjabi-Sikhs have a notable participation in martial arts, which again, could not be afforded due coverage and

analysis in this study. Fleming (1995) noted how earlier, speculative studies of young British South Asians and sport (Carrington et al. 1987), have indicated a “causal link between sporting activities and self-defence” (p.111). For Punjabi-Sikhs in this country, martial arts such as *kung fu*, *tai kwon do* and particularly *karate*, have been popular recreational activities for three decades. There is indeed, a connection between enjoying such ‘sporting’ activities in and for themselves, and also to develop a physically articulated defence of the self against any violent attack. As noted earlier in this chapter, Modood et al. (1997) have indicated how a persistent lack of faith in policing has stirred some ethnic minority communities to organise self defence groups for themselves. GNG Shelby football team’s Tony is himself a black belt in *karate* (the highest belt/grade that can be attained in the martial art), having achieved the grade in 1979. *Karate* clubs in areas of high Punjabi-Sikh population are not uncommon. They are usually run by Punjabi-Sikh tutors who hire local council maintained venues such as schools or community halls, to teach young Punjabi-Sikhs in the locality the ‘art’ of *karate*.

Aside from those sports necessarily omitted from this thesis, there are areas of critical analysis that have also fallen prey to the unforgiving demands of temporal and spatial constraints. The issue of sporting nationalisms could not be fully drawn out, whilst the intention was to concentrate on the manner in which regional and ethnic identities collide/collude within a specific ‘ethnographic’ group (Keaneston Rovers Football Club), the sequential extension of that debate would explore the nature of that group’s

identification with the nation in which they lived, most illustratively and appositely through their support or non-support of the English national football team. Whilst I have explored the theoretical implications/contingencies and experiential realities of this nationalism debate elsewhere (see Bains and Johal, 1999), it was virtually impossible to give this topic the measure of critical attention that it requires. Indeed, such a contentious subject matter, that because it has no universally equalising/unifying resolution or even framework, requires a multi-theoretical thesis of and for itself to provide an adequate attempt at scholarly analysis.

Earlier criticisms made of the few existing studies of South Asians and sport in Britain can be partially levelled at this work. Endeavouring to “avoid the pitfalls of false universalism” (Fleming, 1994:165), this work categorically attempts to provide a historical and contemporary analysis of the sportive experiences of one particular South Asian band, namely Punjabi-Sikhs. However, it must be acknowledged that even such labelling and definition of a specific ethnic group harbours and conveys a degree of nomenclatural slippage, for within the broader sub-group of Punjabi-Sikhs in Britain there are caste differences as well as those of economic disadvantage/privilege and indeed of social mobility, ambition, and attitude. Locating the study in the ethnographic universe of the West Midlands, has engendered unavoidable restrictions of regional location. The ‘subjects’ of this study whilst pertaining to herald from specific locales, and being subject to the various economic, social and cultural nuances of those locales, do not necessarily purport to represent

the experiences (sportive or otherwise) of the greater Punjabi-Sikh community in Britain. However, since they do have points of commonality with other Punjabi-Sikh groups in other regions (particularly concerning the experiences of Punjabi-Sikh football teams and of attending/participating in tournaments), they can be used to provide a workable template from which wider Punjabi-Sikh experiential realities and potentialities can be extrapolated.

A substantial omission of this work, and one that has been self-reflexively admitted, is that of the sporting experiences of Punjabi-Sikh girls and how they relate to sport on multiplex levels. The admittance of such an excision does not compensate for the fact that any study concerning the association of any group/community with sport only represents half an undertaking if it only accounts for the specific experiences of only half of the group in question. For too long the study of South Asian girls/women and sport has been left on the substitutes' bench. This is an area of research that deserves a place in the first team of scholarly enquiry.

This thesis has made an attempt to rip the study of sport and ethnic groups away from their reassuring, 'safe' moorings in a 'participation/leisure/school sports model', and instead tried to, "place sport and recreation within the broader context of the cultural and social norms of the ethnic groups... [avoiding] easy assumptions based on

models of minority communities which assume that 'they' are lacking in interest, the will or the ability to participate" (Verma and Darby, 1994:3). By adopting this framework, this study has attempted to disavow popularly (and some scholastically) held beliefs of British South Asian sporting disassociation, indifference, ineptitude and disinterest, by beginning to provide an analytical account of one South Asian community's historical and contemporaneous intimate bond with sport. Indeed, by outlining the historical underpinning of the cultural and religious predicators of Punjabi-Sikh sportive association/identification, this study tries to undermine the essentialising drives that attempt to deny South Asians any sporting pedigree, expertise and ambition. Whilst it begins to achieve such aims, this work can only be a precursive platform from which many of the issues raised can be further and more focally explored, allowing for new and more inventive explorations into and through the multi-dimensional myriad of South Asian sporting experiences in Britain and on the Indian subcontinent.

APPENDIX

List of competing Punjabi-Sikh Teams in Birmingham *Shaheedi* Games Tournament 2000:

- Azaad Sports (Birmingham)
- BDS Birmingham
- Coventry Sporting
- GAD (Derby)
- GGS Bradford
- GNG Leicester
- GNG Smethwick
- GNG Southampton
- GNP Coventry
- GSA Erith
- Guru Nanak (Gravesend)
- Guru Ravidass (Birmingham)
- Khalsa Leamington
- Khalsa Leicester
- Khalsa Reading Singh Sabha (Watford)
- Khalsa Warriors
- Longford
- Mahal FC
- Mahal Warriors (Birmingham)
- Park Commercial (Birmingham)
- Punjab Colts (Birmingham)
- Punjab Rovers (Wolverhampton)
- Punjab United (Derby)
- Punjab United (Wolverhampton)
- Sapna FC (Leicester)

- Shere Punjab (Birmingham)
 - Sikh Centre (Leeds)
 - Sikh Centre (Leicester)
 - Sikh Hunters (Walsall)
 - Sikh Temple Rangers (Southall)
 - Singh Brothers (Birmingham)
 - Singh Sabha (Birmingham)
 - Singh Sabha (Hitchin)
 - Singh Sabha (Hounslow)
 - Singh Sabha (Kettering)
 - Singh Sabha (Peterborough)
 - Smethwick Rangers
 - Southall Rangers
 - Sporting Khalsa (Walsall)
 - Sunrise (Southall)
 - Warley Rangers
 - Wheatsheaf (Coventry)
 - Wonder Vaults (Birmingham)
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